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HE'S BACK

The loser legacy continues as Larry's nephew goes to college for raunchy parties, lots of liquor and sexy women!

LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE: **DOOM 3** SURVIVAL KIT ◀◀**LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE** ◀◀HIGH-END 3D **GRAPHICS** CARDS GROUP TEST ◀◀**THIEF III: DEADLY SHADOWS REVIEW** ◀◀

12 IN-DEPTH HARDWARE REVIEWS ◀◀

RETRO SECTION - COMMODORE AMIGA 500 ◀◀

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3 PREVIEW ◀◀

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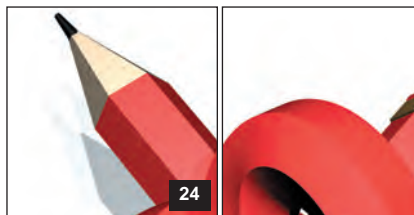
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TECHNOLOGY

Doomed to be great

Some industry insight - if you're interested... If not, laugh at the caption of the month and then enter the killer DOOM 3 competition on pages 50 & 51.

A few weeks ago this magazine looked a little different - there was no sign of DOOM 3 anywhere, except our rather clever Survival Guide. Then something happened out there in the world of game publishers, developers, distributors and retailers. Someone high up somewhere dropped the release date for DOOM 3 - it was early and unexpected. In case you're thinking, "I've heard that one before... like how many years ago? When it's done my large hairy butt it is". You'd be wrong. id Software, Activision and everyone else are deadly serious. *[Holding thumbs]*. But back to my insight - not too long after the date was announced I was invited to a few inconvenient meetings right in the middle of my deadline schedule - after about 6 seconds of arguing and protesting I caught wind of what the meeting might be about and, needless to say, powered down my gas chair and hit the highway. The result... a number of adverts and a cracker competition all put together in the eleventh hour - exciting news I'm sure you'll agree. By the time you read this page you'll only have about 2 weeks to wait until you can go down to your local game stockist to find out it's already sold out...

Now for the point - this is purely speculative so don't quote me here. Why do you think that id Software and Activision decide to sweep away all the marketing plans, teaser campaigns, special promotions and so on to release the game so suddenly into the market? This is the question. I have some ideas.

Perhaps they found out when Half-Life 2 was going live and decided to scrap the marketing rollout and subsequent media hype bandwagon and, based on that date, decided that August 13 *[which is a Friday incidentally]* was do or die day. Perhaps they looked at the monster line up other publishers are sitting on for the madness that is Christmas *[Electronic Arts springs to mind here]* and thought it might be better to release the game now thereby scooping up all that money that's just lying around in wallets and under beds this time of the year. Perhaps they thought they'd just release the game now and save a ton of money on all those T-shirts, lunch boxes, adverts, double magazine covers, posters, adverts, teasers, etc. this makes sense because now for some reason the level of anticipation in the NAG office has reached fever pitch - it's only a month and a half away [at time of writing]. This means no more waiting, no more disappointment and no long drawn out series of teaser adverts and months-in-advance-planning. If that was the intention it worked wonders, and even better for you - you've only got 2 weeks to go [at time of reading]. It's also good for them because this Ed's Note was originally going to be me desperately trying to convince everyone I actually know anything about

this industry and we all know how ugly that can get, but instead it's all DOOM this and DOOM that. Or maybe, John Carmack needs some extra cash so he can lay off making games for a few months and go build a new Ferrari or concentrate on his aerospace hobby [\[www.armadilloaerospace.com\]](http://www.armadilloaerospace.com). Or maybe they planned it like this all along because they're much smarter than we are... I guess we'll never know - but I am going to try and find out and if I do I just hope they don't make me disappear when I do... or worse sign a NDA!

Slim pickings

Moving onto more mundane topics... games these days are scarcer than buzzards on a turkey leg. We have scant few reviews this issue but don't despair we've made up for it with other interesting content, which I'm not going to list here - just trust me. One thing I am going to talk about is the Retro article this month. It's all about one of my great loves - the Commodore Amiga 500. This home computer provided endless enjoyment and entertainment for many of my younger years. It's hard to forget the time I didn't sleep one night because a long lost friend and I were too busy playing the demo of Lemmings to care. It's equally hard to top the memories of the endless matches of Speedball 2 we played and played until one joystick actually broke from the abuse *[fixed later using tinfoil and a drawing pin]*. It was a great system and after its younger sibling, the Commodore 64 formed a solid gaming base many older gamers here will fondly remember. Playing these old games today takes a little getting used to but are still worth it if you invest the time and try and forget all the power and technology we have today.

www.nag.co.za

In more news - go visit our website - on the forums you can now buy a genuine Bonsai Guinea Pig with NAG points you can accumulate by posting on the forums or commenting on news articles. You can even play our version of the lottery - madness I know, but still fun. You can also watch the count down clock until the next issue ships - think of the site as an alter ego to this magazine run by one of the most dedicated webmasters on the planet.

New peep

I'd like to welcome Jacqui onboard the good ship NAG. Jacqui joins us as key account manager *[whatever that means... something in the sales apparently]*? Good luck out there soldier!

I'll say this only once - watch out for the next issue of NAG it's going to be a sell out... you'll see why next month.

Michael James

[Editor]

Girly Magazine...

As we continue to shamelessly exploit both the female form and the average male's response to the female form we present yet another girly cover *[never fear - next month will be very different - picture damp pygmies eating chocolate pudding]*.

They are nice to look at though, just mind the drool see.

Looking for lust? Go here
PAGE 28



Caption of the Month

Each month we'll select a screenshot from one of the games in the issue and write a funny caption for it, well... we'll try and make it funny...

Your job is to see if you can come up with an even funnier caption and send it to: ed@nag.co.za

Subject: **August Caption**

If you use the wrong subject in your e-mail it'll get deleted...

Your prize: Our sponsor for the screenshot of the month competition is Vivendi Universal Games. They said they'll give us something interesting each month... if we don't want it we'll be sure to send it along to the winner mentioned under this block of text.



NAG's August Caption



'Where's that damn shark, the old people are wrinkling' - NAG's [2% lame] effort

June winner



"As a last resort, Monty pulls out his rabbit launcher" - Heston Hoffman

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Specification

Intel P4 3.1 GHz 512KB
Gigabyte GA-8SG800 Motherboard
NVIDIA GeForce4 Ti 4200 with AGP8X
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- Microsoft DirectX 9.0 and OpenGL 1.5 support

WinFast A360Ultra TDH Geforce FX 5700 Ultra



- GeForce FX 5700 Ultra GPU
- CineFX II Engine
- 0.13 micro process
- 128MB DDR memory
- Twin-Turbo II cooling fan
- Microsoft DirectX 9.0 and OpenGL 1.5 support

WinFast A360LE TD Geforce FX 5700 LE



- GeForce FX 5700 LE GPU
- CineFX II Engine
- 128MB DDR memory
- Turbo II cooling fan
- Microsoft DirectX 9.0 and OpenGL 1.5 support

WinFast A340Pro TD Geforce FX 5500



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ON THE WIRE

Games: the national enemy

words james francis

Think we have it bad? The worst reaction the west has ever seen directed against games were lawsuits; usually frivolous and exploitive in nature. Basically someone was upset and sued someone else, but even in these cases it needed someone to die before anyone took action. Generally headlines in tabloid rags showing how the evils of games are corrupting society are the modus operandi. But not North Korea. Over there one of their state-run newspapers posted a scathing piece on Ghost Recon 2, because the story line tells of a renegade North Korean General who steals food for his army and then proceeds to invade China. "Through propaganda, entertainment and movies," read a recent column in the Tongil newspaper, "[Americans] have shown everyone their hatred for us. This may be just a game to them now, but a war will not be a game for them later. In war, they will only face miserable defeat and gruesome deaths."

Boy, are they pissed.

Of course this does bring to surface how various cultures react to a game. For instance when Return to Castle Wolfenstein was released in Germany, all the Nazi insignias were removed (mainly because Nazi symbols are illegal in Germany). A lot of war games are all over the market and they all have bad guys. While it appears the Japanese didn't have much of an issue with the Medal of Honor expansion Rising Sun, featuring soldiers from the rising sun doing kamikaze charges, are the Vietnamese as eager on Vietcong and the plethora of games from that era on the verge of release?

And not everyone was happy with Command & Conquer: Generals. The gung-ho Americans and Imperialist Chinese seemed fine, but the GLA drew a lot of attention with its chemical weapons, rag-tag militias and techniques that remind one a lot of guerrilla fighters (or terrorists, depending on your point of view). This caused a small but surprisingly loud outcry of discrimination and accused the game of political incorrectness.

Then there was GTA: Vice City, which drew complaints from the Haitian Embassy in the US, saying the game discriminates against their country. In fact, there are a lot more instances like these than you'd think.

The question is: should developers be more responsible or is this the inevitable by-product of the 'us vs. them' nature of games? I don't know yet, but it's bound to become a bigger issue as games continue their climb upwards into entertainment royalty.

50% of gamers are pirates

Piracy is still very much alive and well

Copy protection experts Macrovision held a survey amongst some of the leading games sites to determine how many gamers get pirated games and how often. An astounding 52 percent of the 2,219 gamers that responded admit to having received cracked software; 33% of those have gotten ISO images (a single file that can be written as a complete CD). Fifteen percent of the gamers have received 15 or more pirated games over the past two years. This report comes in the wake of the ESA's serious look at piracy. They reckon that the industry loses at least \$3 billion a year to it. Macrovision agrees, adding that the longer a game takes to be cracked, the more revenue the publisher and developer gets. Most of the people polled wouldn't wait longer than six weeks to get a free copy of a game instead of buying it.

Half-Life 2 thieves arrested

Thieves brought to justice in Half-Life 2 source-code theft

Valve has announced that several suspects in multiple countries have been arrested by the FBI in connection with the daring Half-Life 2 source-code theft. According to the company's CEO, Gabe Newell, this was as a result of online communities tracking clues and unravelling the mystery of the crime. "It was very uplifting to see how the community rallied and tracked these people down. Everyone here at Valve is once again reminded of how much we owe to the gaming community," he added. The Northwest Cyber Crime Task Force, a branch of the FBI handling the case, didn't comment but affirmed that arrests have been made.



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Billboard honours games

GAMES ARE NOW SET TO CROSS THE BOUNDARIES OF MUSIC

Billboard Magazine, arguably the music authority, have recognized games and their role through its first annual Digital Entertainment Awards. Due to be held on 5 November in Los Angeles, it will form part of the Billboard Digital Entertainment Conference and the panel of judges will be awarding games and game companies over thirty categories. The list includes such traditional categories as Multiplayer Game of the Year, Best Character in a Game, and Best Use of Sound in a Game, but it also includes less traditional fare such as Visionary of the Year. Besides gaming, the event seeks to honour the use of digital media and technology in all aspects of entertainment, such as radio, television, and music.

Billboard

Viacom looks into game advertising

The advertising industry looks for new ways to dupe the consumer with games being the latest victim

According to Reuters, Viacom is looking into more ways to make money from video games, including advertising in games. Product placement in movies and other forms of entertainment have been very common and the media giant is finding out if the same method is viable in games.



"I think the jury is in, people are spending a lot of time in interactive," Viacom CFO Richard Bressler said. "The interesting thing for us is to figure out if there's a market for advertising in video games."

Viacom CEO Sumner Redstone has been actively buying controlling shares in Midway over the past eight months, but he insists this is a private buy not affiliated to Viacom.

Next Nintendo console code-named 'Revolution'

GAMECUBE SUCCESSOR TO APPEAR SOON

Nintendo recently revealed that its next-generation console has been codenamed "Revolution". Little is known about this system at present, other than the fact that it will be powered by IBM's Power5 architecture and will probably feature an ATI graphics core. Additionally, it is expected that this system will be able to connect to a computer monitor without the need for additional hardware, if desired, rather than being limited to a TV set only.

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FROM FARMING IN AFRICA TO PRODUCING ONE OF LAST YEAR'S MOST CELEBRATED VIDEOGAMES, YANNIS MALLAT'S BACKGROUND SHOWS HE ISN'T YOUR TYPICAL INDUSTRY FIGURE. BUT THEN PRINCE OF PERSIA ISN'T A TYPICAL FRANCHISE...



"IN SANDS OF TIME YOU PRESSED BUTTONS AND ENJOYED LOOKING AT WHAT THE PRINCE DID - BUT YOU WERE NOT DOING IT YOURSELF. IT WAS COOL, BUT IT WAS NOT THAT hardcore"

YANNIS MALLAT

YANNIS MALLAT

Ubisoft Montreal



You'd be forgiven for thinking that Ubisoft Montreal should be taking it easy. Practically every game the studio releases is a hit, and last year's Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time is still collecting awards. Most developers might see it as a wise time to start churning out carbon-copy sequels, but Yannis Mallat - executive producer of the Prince Of Persia series - thinks otherwise...

Mallat's first love has always been games, though his background is perhaps a little unusual. After working on farming projects in Africa for several years he decided he needed a change so he moved to Quebec, studied for an MBA then joined Ubisoft in 2000, where he worked on the Rayman franchise and was producer on Sands Of Time. Maybe it's his fairly recent arrival in the industry that's enabled him to look at such an established franchise in a fresh light. Whatever the reason, however, it's clear that there will be big changes for the provisionally titled Prince Of Persia 2. Mallat has decided to rework the game's engine, combat and tone, while drastically altering the narrative to make for a more 'mature' experience. "We're doing it for a couple of reasons," Mallat explains, "and they are two good reasons. The first one is that while the Prince was cool last time, he was not outstanding, and we wanted to convey much more attitude. The second is coming from the market." This may be a cause for concern among some gamers, particularly fans of the original rotoscoped game, who don't want a hero with 'attitude'. Additionally, the last Prince Of Persia title didn't sell very well. But rather than consciously strive for a larger audience, it seems Mallat's design brief this time around views his past triumph as a tech demo of the elements that will be fully developed for Prince Of Persia 2.

He openly criticises the combat in the first game ("repetitive and boring... it was sequential... travel and fight, travel and fight"), and dislikes the superficial implementation of the time powers, but also stresses that with the next game these elements will be "totally embedded" in the gameplay. Does it help to be so harsh on a product that was embraced so emphatically by a cynical industry? "Yes, it's always good to

be critical, because what is 'good' will stay 'good' and be kept. Now we want to focus on what needs to be enhanced. So I see a good bunch of flaws, in my opinion."

As a result, Mallat is happy to reel off an extensive list of things he didn't like in the first game - returning to words like 'immersive', and earnestly discussing "the philosophy" of the game's development. Prince Of Persia's sophisticated combat system comes under attack again, too. "The main word is 'depth'. In Sands Of Time, there was a bunch of enemies sharing the same AI, so it looks a little redundant," he sighs. "Now you'll be in a room and you'll see a scripted event - an enemy fighting one of your allies, for example - and when the fight is over, and the enemy has won, then he can attack you. So from a scripted event, that guy is becoming an interactive character and it is totally immersive."

This philosophy also extends to introducing a larger range of enemies, including giant armoured beasts, glimpsed in the developer's E3 demo reel. "We have taken care to have different types of enemy with their own AI. Human-like enemies, big enemies... Different enemies require a different approach to gameplay, and in that sense you are breaking down the repetitiveness of the game." Mallat has also admitted that POP2 will feature more varied bosses in an effort to elicit some dynamic responses from gamers. "In Sands Of Time you pressed buttons and enjoyed looking at what the Prince did - but you were not doing it yourself," he explains. "It was cool, but it was not that hardcore. In the new combat system, you keep the same philosophy and the same astonishing moves, but this time you are controlling them."

Control. It's a word we imagine stencilled in ten-foot-tall letters on the wall of Ubisoft's Montreal studios, and Mallat seems determined to find a way to bottle it for the licence's core audience. And after delivering such an all-conquering first chapter it will be no small feat to satisfy gamers a second time. Even if we get the impression he's unlikely to satisfy himself...



into the



pixel



Nova
by Harley Huggins
for StarCraft: Ghost
Blizzard
2003

MechAssault 2 Pilot
by Josh Nizzi
for MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf
Day 1 Studios
2003

E3 2004, as part of its 10th anniversary, hosted the Into The Pixel game art exhibition, a showcase of some of the stunning works of art that traditional and digital artists create while conceptualizing a game. In these four pages you'll see some of the highlights; after that head over to www.e3artexpo.com for more...





Soar Throat
by Charlie Wen
for God of War
SCEA
2002

High Moon
by Multiple Artists
for Darkwatch
Sammy Studios, Inc.
2003



Ryu Hayabusa
by Tomonobu Itagaki and
Hiroaki Matsui
for Ninja Gaiden
TECMO
2004



Jak Zoomer
by Various Artists
for Jak 2
Naughty Dog
2003

Arena 77 WarCraft III League Update

Website: <http://w3l.arena77.com>

We have now seen just over a month of play in the Arena 77 Online WarCraft III league, and the leader board is starting to take shape. Some of the current standings may seem a little strange, given the expected performance of certain players, and this is partly due to the fact that some of the higher skilled match-ups have not yet taken place. Aside from this, a group of underdogs have been playing particularly well, and are quite deserving of their positions.

Notably in first place, without a single loss, is Barry "Trend" West who finished fourth at Arena 77's recent ESWC qualifier. Directly behind him is his brother, Richard, also known as "Black", who managed an 8th place at the same competition. Even though they have played more games than most of their competitors, which accounts for their high point scores, their win ratios are also better than most of the Nightfall (nf) players - the notorious empire of local WarCraft III - and if they continue to play at the same standard, one of them could very well finish in the top three overall.

However, it should also be noted that Anthony "Juvenile" Fellowes (winner of the 2003 World Cyber Games qualifier) has also not lost a game, and is not likely to lose in the foreseeable future. But, in what has come as the biggest surprise of the league thus far, Chris "sWoop" Barter, South Africa's

PREMIER DIVISION

Rank	Nickname	Matches Played	Matches Won	Points
1	MoD-Trend	12	12	24
2	MoD-Black	12	10	20
3	nf Manichean	8	7	14
4	nf-Juvenile	6	6	12
5	MoD-ZzniPeR	9	6	12
6	nf-Cavalier	10	6	12
7	BB-Sage	12	6	12
8	-gX-DeaN	7	5	10
9	nf-sWoop	8	5	10
10	BB-Insano	12	5	10

SECOND DIVISION

Rank	Nickname	Matches Played	Matches Won	Points
1	uk-Silicur	36	28	56
2	XpLo-OZiRiS	22	17	34
3	XpLo-Zilk	29	17	34
4	BC-Seraph	20	16	32
5	-gX-SpawN	20	16	32
6	-gX-Ultra-L0rd	19	13	26
7	sR-BlueCollar	14	12	24
8	-gX-Erock	16	12	24
9	dA-terr4pin	15	11	22
10	JaXXass	30	9	18

WarCraft III representative for the Electronic Sports World Cup 2004 has only managed ninth place. As more matches proceed, his standing is likely to rise, but many expected his win ratio to be more along the lines of Juvenile and Trend's. Speculation on his "poor" performance abounds (he has apparently been playing multiple races) but this standing in an online league does not make him any less formidable a player, and he is still undoubtedly the favourite to win the WCG qualifiers this year.

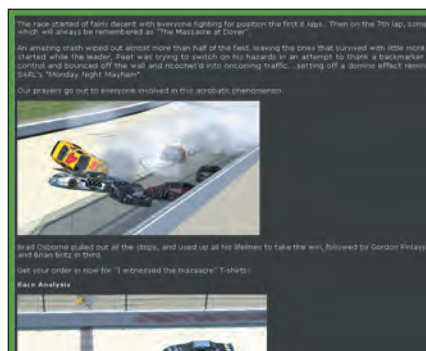
Competitive Racing on the Move

A genre that was once regarded as nothing more than a joke amongst competitive gamers is now quickly starting to establish itself as a serious addition to the usual mix of First Person Shooters and Real Time Strategies. In the September 2003 issue of NAG Magazine, Community.za reported on the first competitive Formula 1 Racing League founded by Rory Mcleod, and more recently, the World Cyber Games announced that two racing titles (Need For Speed: Underground and Project Gotham Racing) are to be included in their Grand Final event this year. However, at a local level, the sport is still extremely small, and the drivers involved are forced to work hard to keep their communities intact. Eventually, we expect racing to become a viable game type in South Africa, and one team of people working towards making that happen is the South African Racing League (SARL), which began informally in June 2003, and has now become a fully-fledged competitive league with weekly races and a very committed player base.

Founded by Conrad Batt, Hubert January and Niel Fourie, the SARL currently uses NASCAR Racing 2003 Season, as well as a number of modifications for the game, and features three separate leagues. The hardcore division runs as similarly to actual professional racing as possible, disallowing any driving aids and enabling realistic car damage in the event of a crash or collision. The rules are strict, and drivers are carefully mon-

itored by the administrators to ensure that all races are fair and that proper conduct is observed. The other two divisions use mods for the game, Trans-Am (V8 engines such as Mustangs, Corvettes, Vipers and Jaguars) and Craftsman Truck Series (which also functions as the beginner's league). Races are held on various nights of the week on servers provided by the SAIX Games Service (for anyone who is not already aware, this means anti-swearing rules will be strictly enforced).

Sign-ups for the league are done through SARL's very informative and well-maintained website: www.sarl.co.za, which also boasts detailed race reports, driver statistics, a forum, and all the essential downloads. Interested players will find the community helpful and easy to get into, but as SARL administrator Dewald Batt warns, there is a slight catch. "This game is a realistic simulation and so has a rather steep learning curve, which seems to be the only factor stopping our community from growing even further. Many new racers who sign up seeking a quick thrill are discouraged by it and tend to lose interest. It's only those who are dedicated and enthusiastic enough who get rewarded with a truly great racing experience."





Player of the Month

Name: Harry Apostoleris
Nick: InciN
Age: 16
Occupation: Student
Clan: Damage Control
Games: Counter-Strike
Achievements:

- 1st place at rAge CS Competition 2003 (Team: DC.ignite)
- 2nd place at ESWC CS Qualifier 2004 (Team: zE)
- 2nd place in Mayhem Offline league 2004 (Team: zE)
- 2nd place at WCG CS Qualifier 2003 (Team: DC.ignite)
- 2nd place at 1000manLAN CS Competition 2003 (Team: DC.ignite)
- 3rd place at ESWC CS Qualifier 2003 (Team: DC.ignite)

Quote: "Failure teaches success"

How has your ambition for CS changed since you started? Is it discouraging to consistently finish second?

My ambition has definitely changed a lot - when I was younger, I was desperate to make the top five, now it's not so fantastic anymore. It does take some fun out of the game, always coming off second best - don't get me wrong, finishing second is great, but sometimes it just isn't good enough. Sometimes it makes me wonder whether I should carry on playing CS. But I don't think I'll quit.

Tell us about your move from Zero Effect to the new Damage Control.

I think that zE had its chance to beat Evolve at Arena 77 ESWC Qualifier, and our loss in the finals after being 9-3 up made me doubt whether that zE combination would work. I felt that players like Apocalypse, with deadly aim, were essential to beat Evolve at their own game. Gandalf is also a great leader, having taken the first DC overseas. Also, when Prem left, I lost some interest in zE as he was one of the core players.

Do you watch other games just for fun?

Sometimes I watch some Quake3 Arena, I like first person shooters and I enjoy fast-paced games, which is ironic because CS is the slowest game. I don't really like to watch WarCraft, because I have no idea what is going on to be honest. C&C Generals is fun to watch though.

Have you reached a peak in skill, or do you keep improving the more you play?

I think my aim has reached a constant. It has days when it peaks or becomes worse, but generally it is the same. The main thing I'm working on now is my mental play, factors such as patience and out-thinking my opponent. I think another big factor in major games is respect for your opponents. If you are scared of them, you won't play well. But if you respect them for who they are, but aren't afraid, then you will do well.

UT2004 Controversy: Mburr vs Zero-1

When the Organising

Committee of the Electronic Sports World Cup chose to include Unreal Tournament 2004 as a Masters Cup, which would be contested amongst 16 of the best players in the world, they seemed intent on inviting a representative from South Africa.

Two local players submitted applications for selection, namely Karl "Mburr" Buys and Jonathan "Zero-1" Attwell. Much to the surprise of the community, Zero-1's name appeared on the invite list. The surprise factor was due to Zero-1 never having won a national tournament. Mburr, on the other hand, was the winner of last year's World Cyber Games qualifiers, where he beat Zero-1 2-0 in the final.

However, several days later, the Electronic Sports World Cup Selection Committee revoked Zero-1's invitation, replacing him with Mburr.

The reasons for this decision have not been made public, but extenuating circumstances concerning Zero-1's application appear to be involved.

Nevertheless, Mburr will have to cover his own travel expenses to Poitiers, France, but his accommodation and food will be provided for the duration of the tournament.

He joins the likes of xLauke (Netherlands), SK.GitzZz (Germany), rs-ForresT (Italy) and Zulg (Sweden) in the highest skill Unreal Tournament 2004 competition to date.

Community.za will be traveling to the ESWC in France and will have a report back for you in the next issue.



What are the three most frightening statements that you can think of? Perhaps "I Love You", "I am pregnant" or "You have failed". For me the three most frightening words that are more universal without being morbid are Accountability, Change and Empowerment.

As you flip back from the cover page to make sure that you are not reading some self-help mumbo jumbo, consider the statement in all its truthfulness. In the early Sixties family values and conduct were driven by strong Christian principles and the Bible served as the absolute and only charter regulating our lifestyle. They were not allowed to play Pin Ball in the Greek's café, swim on a Sunday and listen to the LM Hit parade. They had to be quiet and socially isolated on the Sabbath and definitely no motorbikes.

One generation later we all have motorbikes and it is great. We listen to the Top 40 with our kids and we love the music. In fact, we occasionally put a music DVD on and as a family we party a bit. We all play computer games (the Greek is now in my house) and we swim on a Sunday (praise for this gift). Forty years ago debate with the Professor was not allowed and most lectures were a dictatorial and solemn affair when monologue predominated. One generation later students wear anything, and on occasion close to nothing, because that is what they prefer. They enter into general debate and intellectual encounter and challenge every iniquity. The focus has shifted from the extrinsic appeal and impact to general intrinsic substance deliberately refuting pomp and all false human stratification. The no-no's are 40 years ago. Was it transformation, evolution, or just gradual common sense transience liberating us from a rigorous and restrictive past?

So what the hell does all this have to do with a gaming magazine, killing your friends and LAN parties? Let me try and get my newest insight into the future across so that the mind of man can understand the complexity that is female.

Let's start with change. We have certainly experienced a huge shift in the gaming and LAN scene here in SA. From the occasional 30 people LAN with free entrance, to the now regular 100+ LAN's and then the big events like rAge, ESWC and WCG. But what does this change mean for the gamer and the host? I'm still in two minds here, but let's start with the gamer.

For the gamer this means that the variety to choose from is now becoming overwhelming. This also means that if you don't like one LAN, you are not bound by the fact that it is your only option. To calm the faint screams from places like Kimberley and Bloemfontein, I know that there are

exceptions. This also means that you will more likely be able to find a LAN that caters for your game preference. What the bigger LAN's provide is the opportunity to truly test your skills for the more popular and accepted games. Unfortunately the bigger LAN's also seem to lose touch with the client, the gamer.

For the host it means that the client base is spread thinner now. If you want to survive, you must do something better, different than the other LAN that you compete with. You must now insure that your network is fairly stable. The power trips are no longer accepted as part of the experience. The host needs to change the perception of "we host LAN's for fun" to "we are running a business". This is where I am in two minds. I love hosting LAN's for the fun. That's why we keep it small, cheap and hopefully personal.

Sometimes I think that we are like the old bookshop that tries to compete with

the big chain stores. Sure we offer personal service and can assist you in many areas. But does the new "client" want personal, or does he want 200 odd strange faces that he can frag without ever knowing who he is? This sounds too much like online play for me.

Conservatism is the mother of fear. Innovation is the inspiration for risk and experimentation. We are involved in such a dynamic world, but also in such a volatile place. If you are neither capable nor pliable enough to cope with these vicissitudes, then you will be stretched beyond your own capacity (and break). More sadly, you will oppose that process, prefer the course of least resistance, namely anger and sabotage and then be removed because of your bad fit. But, we all possess the right of disassociation and of opposition. Tragedy is just, where do you go, if you don't give it a go here! The truth is the band-aid era is over. Gamer's needs are changing. The

Change: Comprehending the psychology of inevitability should be part of the pioneers of LAN's if they are to survive. It most likely will become reality. The seemingly outrageous will convert into normality and entrenched values and conduct will make way for surprising nuances thereof.

Accountability: Never allow greed and ego to distort the way we go about our everyday business. There is no substitute for energy, enthusiasm and truthfulness.

Empowerment: Always ensure that there are a hundred things that you do not understand. Curiosity is life's agenda. Ask, find out, ask again and yet again, until you understand. Spend time with interesting minds and empower yours to lead the next generation into the wonderful world that is technology and gaming.

“The truth is the band-aid era is over. Gamer's needs are changing. The industry tries to follow these trends as best as possible, and LAN's will need to catch up.”

industry tries to follow these trends as best as possible, and LAN's will need to catch up. You will either need to fulfil a specific niche like the Anime LAN's of a while back. Or you need to get your act together and challenge the big players. And don't be fooled, the big players are experiencing this new onslaught and will need to change in order to stay afloat.

Accountability. What an ugly word for most of the younger generation. With garden services, knock-and-drop laundry, home delivery meals of any description, kid hotels (where you can leave your one-year-old, while you and your partner go to Mauritius for a week), child-care facilities of any description as dictated by your unique dual career family dynamic, abortions and a host of new quick fixes, the word accountable is becoming obsolete.

So what if I promised the gamers this and that, if I don't deliver, where will they go? What will they do without the powerful I? This is one of the areas that will need to change in order to ensure that the gaming community stays alive. Truly great people are reserved, discreet and genuinely humble. They are never loud and never want to impress with what they know, have heard or have achieved. Bad language and dirty jokes are the sound of an empty and inferior person. Why don't we clean-up our sound and make constructive criticism where applicable? Don't make your mouth a sewer. Be revered and remembered for what you did not say

rather than for what you did say. Talk later so that you can listen first. In so doing you will not be embarrassed. Be accountable for what we utter.

Because people have lost their sense of accountability, LAN's have seen an increase in theft. So what if I steal his earphones, what will they do? This is one of the biggest threats that we are facing today. I remember one of the regular LANs being cancelled a while ago because somebody decided to expand his technology base by stealing the switch they use for the LAN.

But does this accountability also mean that the host is responsible for all that happens at his LAN? If this would be the case, then it would mean that all the file sharing and CD swapping would need to be regulated by the host. Quite an impossible task. This is further complicated by the fact that no formal introduction into the workings of copyright and the extent of the law is given to the host. I am sure we all know to a large extent what is legal, and what is not. But do I need to verify by law that each operating system is legal? How exactly is that done again?

Let's take a quick look at empowerment. Now what does this have to do with gaming? Not a lot? Everything in fact. Technology has empowered us to an extent very few people take the time to realise. We can now accomplish in a week what most companies would have taken a month to achieve a decade ago. With the technology becoming so mainstream, it has also

made technology affordable. The first two switches that were bought for VC cost R10 000 a piece three years ago. Sure they were fancy and cheaper options were available. But today the same switches are bought for less than R5 000. Cheaper switches are available and will certainly perform at acceptable levels if not pushed to the limits. This means that more and more people can buy a 24-port switch and host a LAN with the main game focus being on "Horse riding lessons by UT, the comeback".

With all the power that technology has given us, we are able to scan for vulnerabilities and exploit them. Although these tools were not necessarily intended for that purpose.

Sure hope that most of you will make it to another premier event on the calendar that goes by the name rAge. And sure hope that your expectations in WCG have been met and exceeded.

My words of wisdom for this month ... Don't just exist, survive and fall into routine. MOVE! You are young for a short time and old for a long time. Don't confuse the two and don't allow too much ambition and the pursuit of wealth to distort the pleasures of real life. Utilize the power that is in your young energy bound bodies and yield technology to remain young forever!

Wolvenoid | www.vc.org.za

INBOX

There is some debate in the office regarding the font size on the letters page - I tell everyone in the office to stick to one font size in the magazine but then I go and use a smaller font on the letters page. Lucky for me I'm in charge and can make these kinds of executive decisions. So to either shut me up or shut the work force up tell me what do you think? Use a smaller font and fit more letters in or up the font size and drop a few letters? Your vote to the following address: letters@nag.co.za - do it now before you forget or fall asleep or be really inconsiderate and stick your finger in a light socket today taking your vote to the grave... NAG Ed.

Letter of the moment

FROM Matt

SUBJECT Cooling

Why should gamers bother with water cooling, hydrogen cooling, or whatever other form of arctic inducing, snow cone creating, twirling piece of plastic, when my PC has never crossed the threshold of 40 degrees? I understand that the previous Athlon processors ran very hot so there is a ripple flowing through the gaming community about cooling for the 64 - heck the old Athlon chips still run hot even with all the cooling you can throw a stray badger at (sorry). The highest my chip has ever been was after being left on for over 2 days in summer at a LAN and even that was only 37 degrees. What am I using then as cooling you may be asking? CPU heat sink aluminium alloy (thermal pad, pull tag and stick), with Cooler Master fan and 2 case fans, one of which comes std with my chassis and the other a Cooler Master dual ball bearing adjustable fan, spinning between 2400 and 3600 rpm. So why bother, with water cooling especially? To set the minds of many avid gamers perhaps looking towards the AMD64 at ease, it runs really cool and you don't need many fans making it sound like Heathrow. And a little fan kiddie stuff to end...."you guys are like so cool, and your magazine is like awesome".

Thanks, you're special too! Subject: Excessive heat and the insane amounts of money you should spend on getting rid of it. Is it all just clever marketing or a serious hardcore gamer problem? You decide. Send all cooling debate mail to letters@nag.co.za. NAG Ed.

FROM Not known

SUBJECT Technology

I got my PC a few months ago and, despite a few minor problems, it serves me well. Yet it disappoints me to see newer, better PCs in the shops! It "was" a top of the range computer and, despite efforts to upgrade, it isn't the best anymore. Alas, even the NAG CD requires a 3.1 GHz processor and I have but a mere 2.5 GHz. Is technology moving so fast that it will leave us gamers in the dust? Rich folk will probably be able to keep up but most gamers are not rich, except the NAG staff of course. In the past you could have ruled LAN's for months with a 64 MB graphics card, but today a gamers reign can only last a couple of days. What can one do to fix this problem and keep our gaming world intact? How dramatic! Firstly, consider that you can buy much more computing power today for the same money than a few years ago. Technology does move quickly but most game development cycles are a minimum of 2 years so anything decent you buy today should be able to run anything that comes out in the next 2 years [note: broad generalisation]. If you spend decent money on a monitor, case, keyboard and mouse, hard drive and motherboard you should be able to upgrade your machine at least once during its lifecycle by buying more RAM, a new CPU and graphics card. What you say

is true about the fast pace of upgrading and technology but if you plan your initial purchase intelligently and do your research you can stay in the comfort zone for longer than most people realise. You also don't have to run all your games on their highest settings - yes it's nice but you'll be surprised what Far Cry will run on if you tweak the settings enough. NAG Ed.

FROM Heinrich

SUBJECT Suggestion

Have you guys considered running a 3D modelling or animation article in your magazine? I'm talking about an in-depth, step-by-step tutorial for making something like a high polygon model of a space ship, race car or even a Human.

In the near future [few months] we're going to be introducing something new to address all these types of questions - just hang in there, the timing has to be just right. NAG Ed.

FROM Allan

SUBJECT Macs

With regards to your response to my original mail about Mac games in May's issue... I just thought I'd enlighten those who do or don't really care about Macs. A person can use a standard USB port on the Mac (standard issue) to use any two button mouse. However because Mac is designed for professionals they tend to be good enough with only one button... like foreplay really. You only need one finger if you know what you're doing! Now I hated Mac until I used one. They are designed for professionals [you've already mentioned that, Ed] and I guess only one sophisticated enough could fathom the possibility of using only one button! Now I love NAG, but sometimes before you (Ed) rant and rave about things make sure you know the facts because someone who knows what's up could easily speak circles around a person who has no clue! Anyway, just thought I'd politely inform the readers that for the simpler minds a regular 2-button USB mouse works wonders!

I didn't realise that Macs were only designed for professionals and that you had to be a professional to use a mouse with only one button? I can only hope that one day I'm so smart I won't need any buttons on my mouse at all - I'll just move it in a meaningful way over my icons. In parting, do be careful what you reveal about your sex life, the only single digit foreplay we can think of in the office involves one finger on the play button of the remote control and the other on the nozzle of a tin of spray and cook. NAG Ed.

FROM Jarrod

SUBJECT Badger Idea...

I reckon Matthew has a brilliant idea going for the Badger T-shirts. The design sounds good too. Maybe if the dude says it's cool you can run a competition for the best designed T-shirt. But that's not the reason why I'm mailing you. Why not take the badger and have him do an amazing stunt through your magazine? You know like those stick men you used to draw in your text books at school, and then flip through them to have the animation come to life!

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SHORTS

FROM Mastermind

SUBJECT Console vs. PC

Hey Ed, my name is Mastermind, I would like to bring up an Issue - it seems that these days... <snip, Ed>

Did your parents really call you Mastermind? NAG Ed.

FROM idx

SUBJECT 'Panda Bear' girl

In my honest opinion, that reply that you wrote regarding her Game Programmer mail was just downright nasty. Rather say something like, "Why don't you go to www.gamedev.net. It is a huge game developer website with many people who would gladly help out newcomers in the business." Rather than just saying, "You are stupid because you don't know what goes on with game development." But the panda-thing was quite funny though :P.

I didn't call her stupid for asking a question, I called her stupid for calling the badger a panda. NAG Ed.

FROM Unknown

SUBJECT Hardware link

You many want to change your "link" [www.esquire.com] to Esquire Technologies at the bottom of page 94, I am sure tons of youngsters are more than happy to go to the Esquire magazine, but those actually looking for motherboards might prefer to go to www.esquire.co.za. Yes, this was an error that we've since corrected. It happens sometimes, we're only human. Sob. You're not from Esquire by any chance? NAG Ed.

FROM System core

SUBJECT Hello

What happened to Duke Nukem Forever? Can you guys beat the truth out of 3D Realms? Unfortunately the 3D Realms management team have their heads too far up their own butts to realise that "when it's done" isn't cool anymore. NAG Ed.

FROM Poland

SUBJECT Far away

I recently moved to Poland and I would like to still read NAG (most of the magazines here in the EU are full of rubbish!) and have it sent over here, but I have no idea where to subscribe. If it's possible could I please get some kind of contact and information what to do?

If you can afford the mailing costs we can send NAG anywhere on planet Earth... for more info mail subs@nag.co.za. Tell me though, why Poland? NAG Ed.

FROM yUDI

SUBJECT Counter-Suck

It is strange that NAG hates Counter-Strike so much considering (if I remember clearly) that you gave Counter-Strike the Best Multiplayer Game award. But then again this was a long time ago - personally I think there is more skill involved in staying alive in Russian roulette than staying alive in Counter-Strike.

We don't have to like a game to give it an award, and like you said, 'a long time ago' - back then Miami Vice was still cool! Counter-Strike has/had its merits - we're just really, really, really sick and tired of it now. NAG Ed.



The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by EA Africa

The winner receives 2 games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch

INBOX

intended, nor should it be disclosed to any other person. Any views expressed in this message are those of the individual sender, except where the sender specifically states them to be the view of <Company name>, its subsidiaries or associates. <Company name> is not liable for the security of information sent by e-mail at your request, nor for the proper and complete transmission of the information contained in the communication nor for any delay in its receipt. Please note that the recipient must scan this e-mail and any attached files for viruses. <Company name> accepts no liability of whatever nature for any loss, liability, damage or expense resulting directly or indirectly from the access of any files which are attached to this message.

Thanks for the mail... I like the animation idea. But that's not the reason why your letter was published. I found it funny that the anal and paranoid disclaimer from Company Name was longer than the message. Is this type of thing really necessary?
NAG Ed.

FROM Unknown

SUBJECT Availability of NAG!

I am really frustrated at this moment, wonder why? Well, if I am not mistaken, my monthly "fix" or "drug" is still not available at our local book shops! What I don't understand is that my favourite website, NAG, indicates that the magazine should be available from 29 April 2004, and today is 5 May 2004! According to the friendly staff (probably sick of me asking the same question every day: Do you have the latest edition of NAG?) behind the counter at the book shop, the magazine was delayed by a week! Is this true?! Do you not understand the severity of your actions? Right now I am suffering from withdrawal symptoms, what I need is my fix, and I need it soon! Every day without the latest issue feels like an eternity, please, give me my fix, my drug, it will help me survive until the end of this month! Beware if the next issue is late...

Firstly, to set the record straight, there is no way that newsagent staff would know if NAG was delayed or not - they don't have access to this information. The date stated in the magazine and website is always correct [NAG has never missed a shelf deadline]. Secondly it helps to provide the dates [thanks] and most importantly which newsagent you're complaining about. So... Notice to all NAG readers: if you notice anything unusual about the way any newsagent is treating the magazine i.e. putting it in the wrong place, always late on shelf etc. please drop me a mail and provide useful details [place and date]. I will then forward the problem onto my magazine distributor who has the ability to permanently correct these types of errors and report back to me. But I can't do anything if I don't know about it. NAG Ed.

FROM Duncan

SUBJECT Complain on Comment on Complaints

It was with some amusement that I read the comments on the last page of the May issue. Amusement because your magazine is not generally known for its grammatical accuracy, spelling or

punctuation, yet this is what you give pointers on. I don't subscribe, and I only pick up the occasional copy when I see a review that interests me, but every time I do read through the magazine I notice that there are errors with regard to the above. Not major errors, but errors none the less, and this is one definite reason why I don't buy the magazine every month.

Some examples from the May issue:

1. "Guide to Power Gaming is a book that every role layer should read..." (Page 112)

2. "...blow it with a lot more forced onto the heat sink..." (Page 104)

3. "...the necessary bits of the radiator and water reservoir is neatly laid out..." (Page 103)

Yes, I am picking on very small mistakes but these small mistakes is what separates your publication from other (dare I say more professional?) magazines. I hope that you do in fact appreciate this as constructive criticism, and please don't letter-bomb my ass.

I'd never letter-bomb your arse - it's your head I'm after! [Just kidding...] Well thanks for pointing out those rather painful errors - they do appear from time to time but it's not just us - almost every magazine I read has a handful of errors here and there, we only comment on reader grammar and spelling to misdirect attention away from our apparent ineptitude in this area. NAG Ed.

FROM Francois

SUBJECT Hardcore Gamer?

What constitutes a hardcore gamer? Having a vast collection of titles may be a possibility, but just having the games and only playing them once a month or so is a waste. Playing 50 hours a week is another possibility, but maybe you're just playing one game all the time?

We've dealt with this issue in the past - anyone care to comment on what makes a gamer a hardcore gamer? Is it Quake underpants for everyday of the week except commando day or are you a hardcore gamer if your kids own a PlayStation?
letters@nag.co.za. NAG Ed.

FROM Shadow Convert

SUBJECT Timeline of games

In the May NAG some guy wrote that some games are starting to take on (insert bad word here) storylines, now after reading that I noticed a pattern appearing, not in the storyline but with the timeline of some games. For example when I got Freelancer I thought I would be sitting day and night burning my eyes out trying to destroy the next level but to my surprise I killed it in a single weekend and to boot the multiplayer dies on you very quickly. Now a game that would be very nice to play would be something like Half-Life 2 - there will be at least 12 chapters, split into smaller episodes (figures unknown) which will each be 3-4 hours long at average play. Now if there are things that need to be sorted out this is one of them.

I don't agree on a number of instances where gamers have complained about games being too short (granted there are exceptions to this). Naturally if you sit for an entire week playing a game every waking moment [12-15 hours] you're going to finish it in a few days. However, if you're like many people who can only spend a few hours a week playing games then it's going to take a lot longer. If you think my logic is flawed talk about it here: letters@nag.co.za. NAG Ed.

FROM Doomed

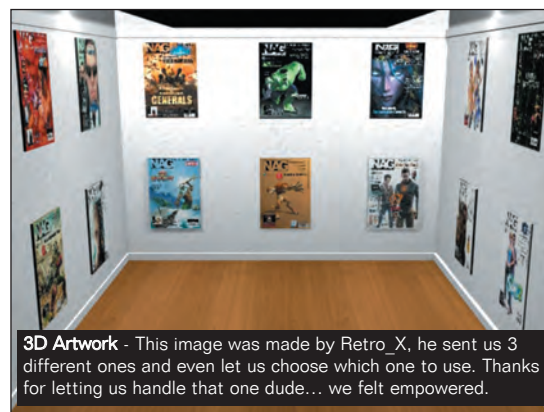
SUBJECT AMD vs. Intel

I read your comment about the tired AMD vs. Intel war. Five years ago (that's about 20 technological years) I was looking for a new PC to buy. The only processor I had in mind was a Pentium III. AMD existed but I saw them as upstarts who dared to challenge Intel. I bought a Pentium III 600 MHz. A few years later I read a review about the AMD Athlon XP 1800+. The reviewer raved on about how it was only 1500 MHz but was faster than a 2000 MHz Pentium 4 and it was way cheaper. I upgraded and bought an Athlon 2000+. Naturally AMD owners started getting cocky because they had faster processors which they paid less for. Later Intel, cowardly, added HT to all their processors. Of course the Intel chip then became a little faster.

Now AMD has their 64 bit processors which are still quite well priced - an Intel P4 3.2 GHz 32 bit costs more than a 64 bit AMD 3400+. Buy Cyrix? They were the same guys who tried to over-clock a 66 MHz processor to about 500 MHz, crazy. By the way doesn't your BMW have AMD stickers on it?

You have to respect anyone who tries to over-clock anything by 750%+. There's little point in arguing about Intel vs. AMD anymore - we shamelessly sold out to Intel (they sent us to E3) in July. Now, if we say nice things about AMD [who don't have any marketing money to spend] Intel won't sponsor our trip next year and we can't turn to AMD then because of the money thing - it's not our fault. Besides, I got a free Intel folding window shade thing for my BMW. NAG Ed.

Visit www.nag.co.za and register!



3D Artwork - This image was made by Retro_X, he sent us 3 different ones and even let us choose which one to use. Thanks for letting us handle that one dude... we felt empowered.



Badger Hunt #7 Winner [June Issue]

[Many might have guessed that we'd hide the badger somewhere on this page, but please in the future refer to the badger as he or him and not it. Below is the winner and his letter].

It's on **Page 64** (Singles Review) on the TV. Charl Pierre Verster.

The end is near for our badger...

Badger [rules]

Some rules: The winner will be picked at random; only send in E-mail (transferring SMS entries onto my PC is painful); the subject line must read: Badger <Month> [example Badger August] I use a mail sorting system, competitions, Caption of the Month, Badger, Spam, Personal etc. so using the wrong subject line will result in accidental deletion or misfiling and you'll never win anything. **Send to:** ed@nag.co.za.

This is what you're looking for each issue - a badger hidden inside a screenshot inside the magazine. Happy hunting!



In 1972, a crack Commando unit was sent to prison by a military court for a crime they didn't commit. These men promptly escaped from a maximum security stockade to the Los Angeles underground. Today, still wanted by the government, they survive as soldiers of fortune. If you have a problem; if no-one else can help; and if you can find them; maybe you can hire...

The Domain of The_Basilisk

THE WAR OF THE WORDS

In the five or six odd years I have been using online forums, I've taken part in countless discussions, debates and flame wars. I've engaged with topics ranging from poor server admin conduct to major gaming competitions to the best sauce to put on braai meat (Steers Barbecue seems to be the one to look out for, by the way). And in all those years, in all those threads and all those posts, I've never lost a single argument. I've always got the upper hand, regardless of the situation, regardless of my opponent(s), regardless of how little I may care about the outcome, and regardless of whether or not I am even in the right. This is not an attempt to blow my own horn and show off how "leet" I am - it is to point out one sad and simple fact: I, unlike almost everyone else, am actually literate.



Many linguists support the theory that every human being has the innate ability to speak in grammatical sentences; the so-called "inarticulate" speech patterns of certain communities (skateboarding teenagers, rap artists, Rastafarians, leet gamers, etc) are actually slightly different dialects with their own fully complex grammar. As an amateur linguist myself, I believe this theory is probably correct. However, speaking is not the same as writing, and while speaking is an instinct, present in all humans, writing is not. In fact, getting children (and later on, adults) to write as they speak is one of the biggest challenges facing the formal education system. Evidently, it is not doing a very good job. People in general are notoriously bad at putting words on paper (or on a screen). In school / university examinations, where there is a choice between short questions or an essay, most people predictably opt for the short questions. When essays are compulsory, the results tend to be below those for tests in which other questioning methods are used (multiple choice, one word answers, etc). But education is supposed to equip people with the skills they are going to need in the real world, and being able to write is one of those skills. University graduates should be at the stage where writing clearly and expressively is second nature. After all, most universities boast of this, and most desirable jobs claim to require it as a bare minimum. But if the forums are anything to go by, I'm sorry to say our economy is doomed. All my sarcasm aside, though, illiteracy

really is a large problem in the professional world. And when you bring it to the forum table, the problem is compounded a hundred times over. Firstly, there are no consequences that follow being an idiot on a forum. You can react to something and put your opinion down before you give it any thought, and even if you discover an error at a later stage, there is no pressure whatsoever to admit or correct your mistake. This is mainly because you never have to come into personal contact with the other forum users if you don't want to. You can quite easily ignore any posts which contradict your point of view or prove you wrong. It doesn't take a NASA engineer to skip over what you don't like or don't feel like reading, and move on. Because of this, the temptation of laziness is all too great. Without any real-life consequences, you can lapse into virtually unintelligible language, and well, it's not going to make much of a difference in your life. But what it does do is piss me off; me and anyone else who might actually be trying to have a decent conversation or an intriguing debate. Forums are a vehicle for sharing information, not for acting like children. With the amount of thoughtless trash that gets thrown around, it's a wonder people with anything valuable to say bother using forums at all.

The following is a guideline to the basics of forum etiquette (and ordinary common sense). If anything I've said in this column applies to you, put your primitive reactionary response to the side for a moment (don't worry, you can send me hate mail later) and take careful note of these pointers:

- 1) Write in coherent sentences. Usually all it takes is a little more effort and concentration on your part, and the rewards are infinite: you will be understood, you will be taken seriously, you will not go to hell.
- 2) Admit your mistakes. Everyone who matters will respect you for it.
- 3) Avoid personal insults. Comments that attack the person rather than the argument are called "ad hominem" (which is Latin for "to the man"), and are the first and most conclusive sign that an argument is failing or that someone doesn't actually have a point to make.
- 4) Don't post unless you have something to say - the golden rule. This may sound fairly obvious, but the number of deliberately off-the-topic posts that one will find on any given forum is staggering.
- 5) Read the thread, the whole thread, and nothing but the thread. If you have just joined a discussion (or a flame war), and you have a question, chances are someone has already answered it. If you want to make a comment, chances are it has already been made. Read first, then type. And for those already involved, when you address a post to someone, give their reply the consideration it demands. The next time someone continues to make the same point after I've just dealt with it, I will have an aneurism.

The day of redemption is at hand. I know where all of you live. 

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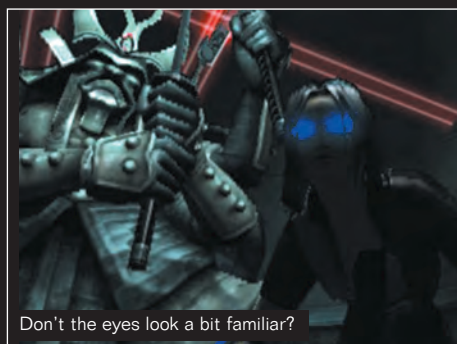
Forever Young

Eternal youth is up for grabs in **Forever Worlds**. Get sucked into a chain of bizarre and beautiful alternate worlds and terrifying time-lapses. As a first-person adventure, immersion into the dramatic story and puzzles should make it a winner. Release TBA [PC]

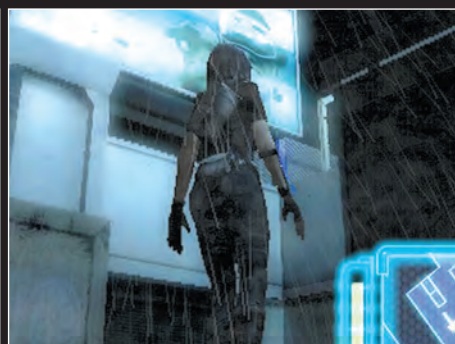


High tech sneaking about and living life as a car... (Don't ask, just read.)

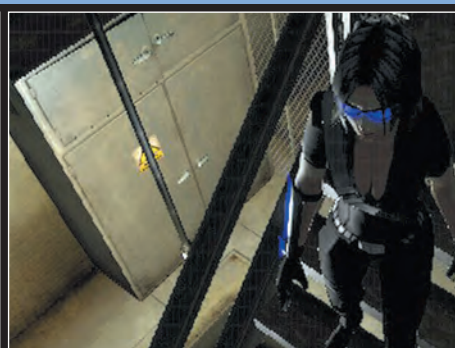
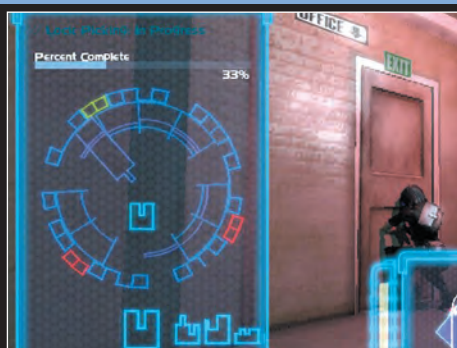
With all the current hubbub around stealth games, it's only natural that developers would try to compete with what seems to be a growing market. **Stolen** is being touted as an ultra realistic, third person, stealth-based, action game based around a high-tech female thief. You'll travel to movie-style locations and steal movie-style expensive things while listening to movie-style music. Hey, that's what they told us. Samantha Fisher, anyone? Release TBA [PC, PS2, NGC, Xbox, GBA]



Don't the eyes look a bit familiar?



A nice female heroine...



...with tons of lovely gadgets!



Ok, this is a bit too strange...

Let's combine intense racing action and deep role-playing elements, shall we? Then, let's call it a CAR-PG. Tricky, wacky courses, mini games and interesting locations all make up **ChoroQ**, an interesting and ambitious title. Release TBA [PS2]



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Veteran computer gaming fans will fondly reminisce about the good old days when games were really exciting and innovative and with each new offering a bucket load of surprises would be unearthed. Fact is, play any game from the late 80s and you'd probably be bored out of your skull within 15 minutes. It was the novelty factor that was the real fix. Sure there were some great titles but games nowadays are vastly superior on nearly every count. There are a few exceptions however and favourites high on many fans lists are the great adventure games from Sierra Online like the Kings Quest and Space Quest series, not to mention a lot of game development celebrities. Top of the day back then was Al Lowe who created the Leisure Suit Larry Series. It was an adventure game full of boyish humour, mature puzzles and clever ideas. In fact, Larry was possibly the adventure game that made the genre a blockbuster haven. How times have changed. It was however great to hear the announcement last year that Vivendi was bringing back this great cult brand into the new millennium – keeping the essence of what made the game so appealing and creating the ultimate 3D adventure series. Although the central character in Leisure Suite Larry will not be the same Larry, his nephew and namesake is now put on the spot, we were pleased to find out that the focus is to bring the same flavour, sarcasm and wacky ideas to the fore – with even perhaps some womanising! We grabbed some of the development team's time and found out what trouble we'd be getting into this time around...



Larry's back and

Looking For LUST

words: Derek dela Fuente



Tell us why the publisher believed it was the perfect time to bring back Leisure Suit Larry and will you be keeping the same persona, traits, and foibles that a generation of gamers came to love in the 80s?

There is a lot of love and respect at Sierra for the point-and-click adventures of our youth. Bringing back Leisure Suit Larry was a matter of when and not if. In 2001 the president of the company put out a call for new product plans, and specifically asked for us to consider Larry. We wanted to be very careful about how we approached this, not just because of Larry's sexual innuendo, but because of how some adventure games faltered in the last few years. We came up with a concept for a game that had the freedom of movement like Grand Theft Auto 3 but focused on making all the interactions funny instead of violent. Roughly at the same time we received a prototype from High Voltage for... a new Larry game. We liked their technology, and asked if they would explore our ideas. They came back with the concept for a Larry game set in college, and we went on from there.

How much do you believe both technology and 3D will push the character and play dynamic forward and will it offer the same 'boyish' off-the-cuff humour and adventure styled play?

The decision to go to 3D was really a no-brainer. Traditional 2D adventure games are all but obsolete at this point. While 2D adventures offered a great deal in terms of story and characters, they were not generally good at immersing the player in the game world. The player had little choice in terms of where he could go and what he could look at. In our 3D world, Larry can go almost anywhere and examine almost anything. The exploration aspect takes a giant leap forward. Of course there's much more to it - 3D allows us to create all sorts of exciting mini-games that you couldn't do in 2D, as well as a whole host of additional features. People used to old adventures will recognize a lot about this game, but they will also experience much more freedom to explore and have fun in the world.

Apart from the graphical presentation what do you feel will be the most innovative feature of the game?

The Conversation engine is one of the most exciting aspects of the game. In it, the player can steer the course of a conversation by choosing what Larry says to a girl in real-time. The player chooses by steering an icon at the bottom of the screen while the conversation is going on.

Can you tell us about how the story behind the game was devised and what the overall aim for Larry will be?

It's important to mention that our game

centres on Larry Lovage, who is Larry Laffer's nephew. It wouldn't make sense to have Larry Laffer go to college, so we needed a younger Larry. Our goal was to stick to the roots of the series and cre-



ate a character that a lot of people can identify with. I think people love Larry because he isn't a typical hero and things don't always go his way. We've been able to infuse a lot of character into Larry through our use of voiceover and our conversation system. There are lots of subplots going on in the game that really give the player a sense of who Larry is. I think many people will be able to identify with aspects of his personality, and others are going to love him just because of what a loser he is. He's definitely not much of a ladies' man, but that doesn't mean he doesn't get lucky every once in a while. I expect people will really enjoy getting to know Larry Lovage as they play through the game.

The Sierra games, as well as Larry, were full of strange and straight-forward puzzles. Have you tried to change this aspect of the game and please will you give us an insight into one of the puzzles - quandaries that will present themselves?

THE LARRY LEGACY...



Leisure Suit Larry and the Land of the Lounge Lizards

1987 - Raunchy for its time, we see Larry try and find love all over the place, digging in dumpsters and getting rich off a dollar.



Leisure Suit Larry Goes Looking for Love (in all the wrong places)

1988 - Eve kicks Larry out, so he embarks on a cruise to find another true love. The KGB chasing him isn't helping much at all...



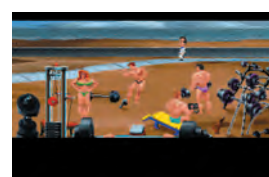
Leisure Suit Larry III: Passionate Patti in Pursuit of the Pulsating Pectorals!

1989 - Enter Passionate Patti as Larry gets dumped by his girlfriend for a lesbian Amazon slot machine repair-woman.



Leisure Suit Larry 5: Passionate Patti Does a Little Undercover Work!

1991 - Skipping straight to five (for some reason), Larry has amnesia, forgets about Patti and gets a job in LA. Patti also gets a new job - with the FBI...



Leisure Suit Larry 6: Shape Up or Slip Out!

1993 - Patti is gone! But Larry doesn't mind - he won a spa trip to an exotic location where he meets his latest 'love of his life': Shamara! Of course, it's never that easy.



For Magna Cum Laude, we've shied away from the puzzles you'd expect to find in a traditional adventure game. While puzzles can certainly be fun, they are often frustrating and annoying. We've replaced a lot of puzzle elements with arcade-style mini-games. For example, if Larry needs a drink to give to the girl you're hitting on, you go to the bar and play a game where Larry mixes the drink, rather than searching high and low for the individual ingredients and combining items in your inventory to make it.

Who are you aiming the game at, in terms of audience, and will it offer adult humour?

Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude is a game for adults. While we have not received a rating from the ESRB we do expect to get an 'M' rating and we are creating a game for age 17 and up. We know for a fact that there are plenty of adults who own consoles.



Can you pinpoint any reason why the adventure game genre has almost died when it was once so popular? Has the audience grown up and become tired of computer games or did they want more sophistication and ideas?

Games and gamers have grown far more sophisticated since the last Larry adventure. Older Larry adventures focused on solving obscure puzzles and navigating dialogue trees. While keeping the spirit of the game the same, we're implementing totally new ways to interact with people and the environment, and giving players the freedom to explore a whole college campus in 3D. What this results in is a living environment that's less like a 2D adventure, and more like... real life. The game is less linear and more responsive to the player than classic adventure games.



Is there a long-term goal for Larry and is this a kind of test to see how successful it will be?

We would like to continue to make and see Larry games beyond the Magna Cum Laude title. We're extremely excited about how things are coming together. We have a really funny game on our hands, it's just a matter of putting it all together and making sure it meets the high expectations of Larry fans, old and new.

What are some of the locations within the game and will there be lots of deep and detailed characters to interact with and are any taken from real life characters?

At the core of the game, you can wander around the game world, exploring the environments, interacting with all sorts of different characters, and getting Larry into trouble. We've created many of the locations you might expect to find on a college campus or in a college town, and each of those locations is full of funny stuff to check out. A big part of our game is the conversation system, in which Larry talks with a girl, and the player controls what Larry says in real time. Rather than using the sort of branching dialogue trees you'd find in old adventure games, the player steers a little icon at the bottom of the screen. If you steer it properly, Larry will say some dumb stuff, but the girl will like him enough to keep their relationship going. If you steer wrong, Larry is likely to say some really idiotic things, and the girl will blow him out. The end result is that the player gets to participate in lots of funny interactions. It's a lot of fun and far better than watching dull cut-scenes to get the story. I'd definitely say that the humour really sets it apart from what people have seen before in video games. [E]





Roller Coaster Tycoon 3



PC

Developer: Frontier Development • **Publisher:** Atari • **Supplier:** MegaRom [011] 234 2680
Genre: Management • **Release Date:** Q4 2004

The Roller Coaster Tycoon series has gone from strength to strength with the franchise selling over 7 million copies.

The premise of the game is simple: to create and experience the ultimate amusement park. With such a user-friendly directive for the player, one that is compelling and inspirational - adding fresh ideas is always the central focus for the inspiration man and creator, Chris Sawyer.

Surprisingly, Frontier Development, the team headed by David Braben (co-creator of *Elite*), will be responsible for this already great-looking title. Chris Sawyer, Tycoon's creator, will still be involved with RCT3 in an advisory role, but it appears through past interaction the whole team is instilled with the same mind-set that created the brand.

The first topic for discussion with David was the important 3D transformation, and how it would affect the play dynamic seeing it was such a completely whole new focus and feel for the game.

"The move to 3D has entailed reworking the entire game, but in the process we have used the opportunity to put in a great deal of extra detail. For example, each stall now has a salesperson in it - you can choose options on food like offering chilli on a burger or whatever. The move to 3D has also greatly improved the 'Peeps' in the parks. Rather than them all being the same, they are now all different, with their own personalities. Different age groups have different tastes - teenagers may prefer extreme coasters while kiddies may like rides shaped like 'teacups'. This means the player has to cater for the different groups - or may choose to specialise in one group only - advertising to the local teenagers,

say. It is when you try the rides and feel the visceral experience of riding the coasters that the game really kicks in, but so many other elements help to make up this great experience. The diversity of the park guests brings the hustle and bustle of the place to life with their changing facial expressions and hundreds of animations including running, jumping and dancing."

Technology is high in the pecking order of the game as David went on to speak, "Our 3D engine is continuously evolving. It has recently been used (in a slightly earlier form) in 'Wallace and Gromit in Project Zoo' with Aardman and in 'Dog's Life' with Sony. It is very powerful, and is for example capable of rendering many thousands of different people on screen at the same time - each with their own facial expressions and animations. It does many fancy lighting effects, like reflective water and real-time lighting and shadowing, but is also very scalable on machine performance - working well on the RCT3 minimum specification of a 733 MHz Pentium 4 with a 32Mb 'T&L' hardware card - like a Radeon or GeForce 2 or better."

Innovations come in many guises and bigger and better could be the first way to describe RCT3. "Yes, the park guests now do a lot more than they did before. They go around in groups and respond to the park in more detailed ways - noticing themes, watching rides and not getting lost! They also can be seen 'riding the rides'. On extreme twists and bends of the coasters the more timid will grasp the restraints with all their effort. Others will cover their eyes, while the bolder ones will hold their arms up in the air."


Getting the right look and feel, creating the right atmosphere and not gild-

ing the lily too much must be taken into consideration. The team has used many reference sources to create the experience and David added that there are many reference parks here in the UK, so sharp eyed gamers may spot some familiar landmarks. They have also been in touch with John Wardley [www.john-wardley.demon.co.uk], the coaster designer, and have kept their noses close to the ground looking out for new coaster designs, most of which will be included in RCT3.

The interface for the game has been worked on and improved and the feedback from the fans has been a great help to the team as some interesting nuggets of information were divulged.

"We have tried to respond to all the various criticisms of the previous Roller Coaster games. There is the much-requested time control option now, park staff can be trained, and as there are far more options available in the game, there is also a good deal more to be researched. We now offer a 'sandbox' mode from the start, as we realise that some people simply want to play around and build the best park they can. Alternatively there will be 18 pre-defined scenarios, each with three difficulty levels."

The game will also feature a lot of construction themes, especially to compliment the sandbox mode. Players will have access to themes like Western, Spooky, Space and Adventure. All the rides will obviously have un-themed versions, but theme creation itself will have a definite appeal, since you can now extend this to the entrances and exits, décor and even staff uniforms.

With at least 6 months before completion RCT3 is looking to be the definitive game of the series so far but would we expect less? 







Juiced



PC | PS2 | Xbox

Developer: Juice Games · **Publisher:** Acclaim · **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Racing
Release Date: Q4 2004

Over the last few months, with its eye-catching appearance at E3, Juiced has been receiving some noteworthy comments. It's a fast paced arcade racing game that will have plenty of competition coming up to its release later in the year. Derek dela Fuente spoke to with Stephen Powell - Project Manager and Richard Badger - Lead Designer, from Juice Games.

Billing Juice as part simulator, part arcade racer rather blurs the exact nature of the game but this was all explained by Stephen, "this really refers to the usability of the product versus the believability and excitement of the experience. We want to communicate the sense of being there, of recreating a reality that reflects the scene, while ensuring the accessibility and fun that an arcade experience delivers."

Games like Burnout, Need for Speed and other slick looking racers focus on top of the range cars but serious racing fans say the discernable differences under the bonnets are rarely as varied as gamers want. With Juiced the intention is to go the extra distance with cars that match their real world counterparts in terms of performance.

"The cars are all fully licensed and based on manufacturer's specifications. Stock models in the game reflect the manufacturer's figures. We had to

develop a system that could handle performance tuning. This involved our physics expert getting to grips with a lot of engineering theory and developing a model that would cope with the very different geometry, power and weight of each model, and the 'before and after' effects of adding a turbo, nitrous-oxide etc. Also, the model shows pronounced differences in handling between front, rear and all wheel drive cars. Each drive type requires a different driving approach to get the best lap times.

"A major difference in Juiced is that the player determines the strategy and tactics for progressing. Juiced does not have a traditional level based progression. You don't unlock tracks directly by simply winning - you must influence other crews in order to progress and there is no fixed order in where you start. In career mode there are several game types with different objectives. In general, the challenge is to earn enough respect so that other racing crews want you on their turf. Once you have gained enough respect in all the right areas, you call the shots and organise the events. Each crew has its own likes and dislikes, so there are many different ways to impress them. Respect does not gain credits to upgrade your cars... you'll need cash for that."

Respect is an important part of the





game's dynamic. While winning races will get you cash for upgrades and funding your crew, doing damage to opponent cars causes loss of reputation - and this is what you need if you really want to excel in the game. You'll also have a high level of control over the technical aspect of the game, since a solid, well-performing car is vital if you want to impress and beat Juice's racing opponents.


If you run an analytical eye over some of the recent racing games, all have been impressive and most have been as good as anything we have seen previously. But true innovations have been few and far between. "There will always be room for improvement. Game AI is still nowhere near simulating true human responses and thought processes. Our belief is that a single player game and multiplayer game should be the same, but with AI replacing people when you are offline. There's plenty of work to do in this area. In the future your crew could be real people recruited online, but offline the AI takes on their traits and styles to simulate their behaviour. So offline is where you learn, and online is where you do real battle. Physics systems, even at best, are still based on generalisations and approximations. We will get to a stage where everyone is able

to build a driving model that reflects reality perfectly, but then the experience will depend entirely on the rules of the game - just like real life. A good example of physics enhancing the experience is of course damage - sometimes destruction is the most satisfying reward. Juiced has that plus highly customisable handling and performance for each car and AI crewmembers that you manage during the racing."

Juiced is based on a

huge city divided into a number of districts, each with their own characteristics and racing environments, from industrial areas to cosy suburbs and run-down areas to modern downtown. Every track has its own traits and graphical beauty, so it will be hard to pick a favourite as they all look pretty impressive, especially racing after a downpour as the wet tracks look stunning at any time of day or night and adds the extra challenge of reduced grip.

There is plenty of customising to be done and both explained some of their favourite modification combinations. "For example, I'll take a stock RX-7, add Magnum bumpers and skirts, plus an HK composite hood for looks and weight saving. So now it looks cool but the drag factor is up, so we'll need to add a high performance fuel delivery system from AEM and a cold-air induction system. Next we'll add a performance exhaust system from Rage in the UK, and a cool set of 17-inch Oz wheels with competition tyres. The final touch will be a pearlescent, two-pack paint job at the local body shop. Of course in reality, this is going to take some time to accomplish and a wedge of cash! You'll put the car on the rolling road to check out the performance improvements, but stuff like brake upgrades will only be evident once you're on the street and in the action."

One pleasing aspect of the game will be good car deformation and although manufacturers don't want the safety cage compromised, which is fair enough, everything else constitutes a crumple zone. In Juiced, the damage is largely cosmetic, but it is truly procedural (never the same twice) and can turn your work of art into a shameful heap quite easily. When parts fly off during the races, they then become persistent hazards on the track. And don't forget, damaging someone else's motor also means you lose respect and sometimes that's all you'll have left. 



Enough said...



Worms Forts: Under Siege



PC | PS2 | Xbox

Developer: Team 17 • **Publisher:** Sega • **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150 • **Genre:** Tactical
Release Date: Q4 2004

Anyone who has been around long enough might remember a game called Worms, and if you've been around that long then you must remember playing it on the notorious Amiga CD32 and if you've been around that long then you probably also struggled to decide if you wanted to play Lemmings or Worms at the time - yes, the good old days. Then we had 3D, a metamorphosis into a game where the play dynamic is still as frustratingly compelling as it ever was but you had even more freedom to explore the game world. Now the next instalment is imminent and fans can look forward to another title in this franchise - Worms Forts: Under Siege.

Team 17 is one of the few developers that have stuck close to their original roots - still based in Wakefield, Yorkshire, and still including the creative mind of Martyn Brown, the Creative Director, who worked on the

very first Worms title. "Worms Forts is a new branch-out for the Worms series, so it's not a sequel as such to Worms 3D - although we've kept the universe and feel of the game very similar in look and flavour. Many Team 17 people have been with the company for some time now and many are working on Worms Forts."

Some harder to impress gamers who may not be particularly au fait with the Worms franchise, have been murmuring that Worms is top of the list in the nostalgia stakes with a well established brand name, but is possibly well past its sell-by date. One the other hand, as long as the team keeps abreast of a number of current trends and creates cerebral and taxing ideas for the loveable cast, it could go on for many years with some really inventive ideas, possibly topping its previous achievements. Martyn was eager to give his own views, "Those comments could very easily be attributed to many licens-

es, brands and franchises in the marketplace today. In terms of Worms, I believe we've really tried to move the game forward, keeping it fresh and enjoyable for a whole new audience. The games industry is a different place to how things once were. New, original titles are considered publishing risks and as a result, Team17 as a commercial concern with some 80 staff will only work on titles that we believe publishers intend to release on the market - there are many great unsigned, unreleased games and developers out of business. In short, developers options aren't what they were - but we are lucky that we own the Worms IP ourselves and can develop it in the way we see fit."

Humour plays an important part in the success of Worms, which will always be a focus but it's the mix of puzzles, ingenious use of weapons and a rock solid plethora of ideas that make up the perfect recipe. The fea-



You have to build? What about blowing stuff up?



tures list offers a good insight at the new direction the game has taken - the chance to build huge fortifications to defend against your opponent's attack, 'Attack' being on a scale never before seen in a Worms game, with up to 30 different weapons and multiple upgrades.


"The most obvious departure of the series is the focus on building your castles and forts, expanding your reach, with less emphasis on merely killing worms or knocking them in the water. There are many opportunities to build and expand, making it a little bit more strategic than say Worms 3D."

"As for the technology side of the game, we're always looking to expand our technology - Worms 3D may not appear technically advanced but its engine is, since it's a fully dynamically deformable environment - there are very few other examples of this. We also develop our game series across multiple platforms so sometimes we are limited in terms of expansion in order to keep the content viable across these platforms - but above all we concern ourselves with the way our game plays and not producing a technology demo."

The weapons is one aspect of Worms that Team 17 have focused serious attention on, "We've really cut loose with the weapons in the game now, there's some ridiculous stuff in there which include firing a bishop out of a mortar (he loves it really), a wooden boat that unleashes a horde of manic apes and a hamster-firing mini-gun. In addition we have a wide range of buildings that can be quickly constructed which offer new weapons, tools and facilities."

Players will travel through ancient mythologies and experience unique Worm style Egyptian tribes, Greco-Roman sieges, Oriental Samurai and King Arthur's Medieval Knights - there will be tons of customisation, environments and fort styles to unlock, not forgetting online play. Of course, these are all presented in the series' latest evolution - going 3D.

"We thought about the 2D-to-3D transition for a long, long time. We waited until we were confident that the main aspects could be developed without making major compromises - much of this revolved around a dynamically deformable environment and movement/firing controls that felt like the 2D game. I think for the most part, we pulled it off and surprised a few people and we will continue to improve and refine the series now we have a good grounding."

It did appear that Worms Forts: Under Siege has a number of elements still under wraps and we are sure that in the forthcoming months Team 17 will present a surprise or two to keep the momentum building before its release. 

"The most obvious departure of the series is the focus on building your castles..."



interview:

PARIAH

Billed as a First-Person action blockbuster, Pariah is already being spoken about as the big release for early 2005. We spoke with head honcho at Digital Extremes, James Schmalz, about the game that was one of the stars at E3.

What were the main reasons for stepping away from the 'Unreal' franchise, when the easy option would have been to develop another title in the series?

You just start to get an itch to do something different after working in the same universe for almost ten years. With a brand that spans that many years comes a fan base with specific expectations for what they want and expect to see in an Unreal game. So it's difficult to really stretch our creativity and innovation. By creating a new universe with Pariah we're not limited to the boundaries that the Unreal universe has created for itself.

Could you provide a little of the back-story to 'Pariah' and what players can expect to get up to within the game?

If the readers go to Pariahgame.com they can read the latest information about the game, which we updated for E3. Our overall goal is to have a killer single player experience with great action and a great story backed up by a great multiplayer component.

'Pariah' makes use of the Unreal engine; what custom modifications have you made to ensure 'Pariah' looks different from everything else on the market?

We have spent the last year and a half enhancing the engine, so the list is endless as to what we have done. We have huge improvements on the performance side of things. Some of the more notable things are bump mapping, vehicles and a very rich single player AI system, the integration of the Havok physics engine and some other things that will really surprise people when we start talking about them.

Will 'Pariah' bring any new ideas to the fps genre or is it more along the lines of polishing concepts that are already there?

Yes, we are trying a lot of new things. We are taking the core play dynamic that we have worked with many times in the past and are adding to it to create a fresh new feel different from other FPS games. A few of these things we can't talk about yet, but one of the big ones that we have put a huge amount of time

into is the story. We are integrating a great story into the game better than anyone has done in the past. We want to create an experience that you care about and get drawn into like never before.

Is 'Pariah' focused on single-player or can we expect some multiplayer features?

Pariah is very single-player focused with an in-depth storyline and back story, however we wouldn't leave our roots behind... people will be very pleased with the multiplayer features we're including in the game.

Will the game be predominantly focused around action, or can we expect some tactical overtones within the game?

We're calling Pariah an action/survival game. The idea being that your job is to survive through the game. How you do that will be up to you, whether that means hauling ass, guns blazing into a fire fight or taking a step back to analyse the situation before making your move and gaining as much advantage as you can before alerting the masses. It's an interesting twist on the usual run-and-gun style that most FPS fans are used to.

What's the single most exciting aspect of 'Pariah'?

What's really exciting about Pariah is that it's the new FPS for people to sink their teeth into. It's not a sequel like many of the other FPS games coming out...we're a whole new world for people to explore and get excited about and add to their collection of other great first-person shooters.

Pariah is scheduled for 2005 on PC, PS2 and Xbox



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*Bundled software versions are subject to change without notice

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El Matador




PC

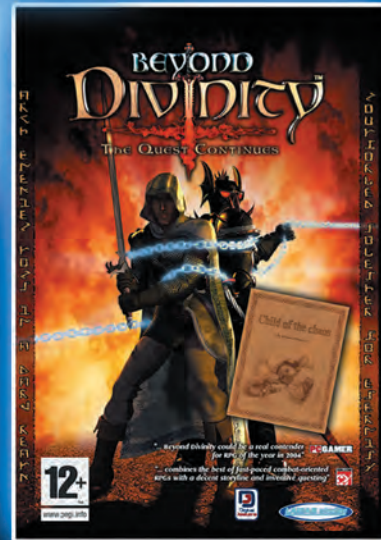
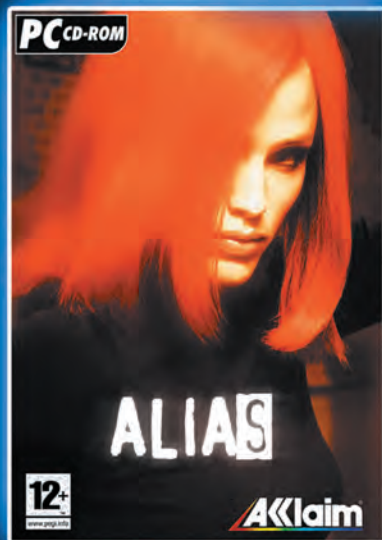
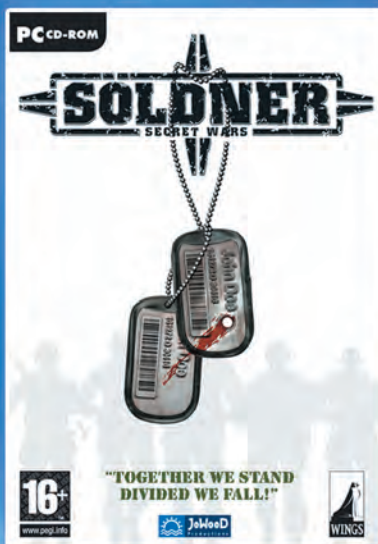
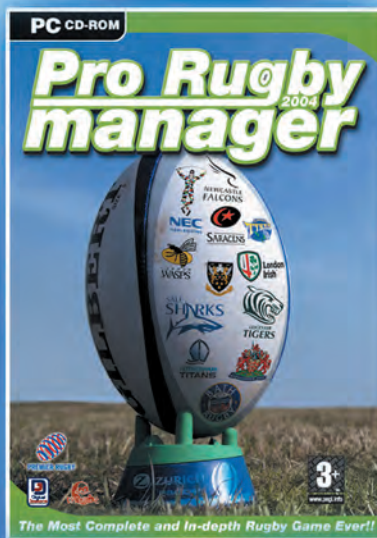
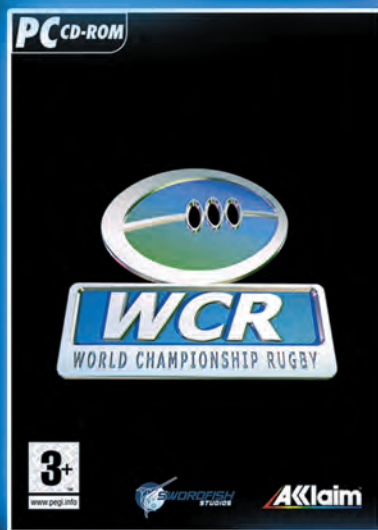
Developer: Cenega • **Publisher:** Cenega • **Supplier:** Bowline [021] 550 9700 • **Genre:** Tactical Action
Release Date: Q3 2004

Game studios are slowly but surely crawling towards settings other than far-off planets, monster-filled castles or secret government facilities. With crime-genre games becoming more and more popular, it's not that surprising that a game is announced in which you play a rogue DEA agent out for revenge against a South American drug cartel. But unlike the popular theme in the movies you won't lose your family, go to Columbia, seduce some bimbo and in the end storm the bad guy's villa with a huge gun and torn shirt.

While our protagonist is on a revenge spree - the cartel killed his brother - the game takes on the role of an action-sneaker, much in the tradition of Hitman and Splinter Cell. Most of the action takes place in South America and the developers plan to include features such as a command hierarchy, allowing higher officers to tell soldiers below them what to do. In other words, spook a big bad guy and you might just have everyone after you at once. The engine itself also promises visually stunning environments - it seems Russian developers have a knack for making truly immersive environments.

Cenega themselves still need to break into the market with a blockbuster title, but titles like Creature Wars and Shade already carry a lot of promise and from what we've seen so far, we might soon extend that same courtesy to El Matador. 





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GET READY TO PLAY...





Predator: Concrete Jungle



PS2 | Xbox


Developer: Eurocom Entertainment • **Publisher:** Vivendi Universal • **Supplier:** Nu Metro [011] 340 9345
Genre: Action **Release Date:** Q4 2004



When you think about it, it's a bit strange: we've had a plethora of Alien vs. Predator games, going as far back as side-scrolling action titles, but the individual franchises never really took flight in game form. The Alien series had the memorable Alien Trilogy and Predator was a bit more focused - both movies got game treatments on the NES and DOS respectively. But the two characters figured that strength in numbers is a better thing, resulting in the swath of AVP titles on offer. Still... neither Predator games actually involved playing the predator, and in all the AVP titles you were either stuck on an alien planet or some ship. Not in a modern city.

Obviously taking a leaf from Predator

2's book, the infamous alien hunter is hitting the concrete jungle and this time you get to control him. Taking place in both 1930 and 2030, sadly our predator isn't out for a good hunting trip but instead bent on revenge against a criminal organization that has gone and upset the monster. In the style of a 3rd-person action title, you'll be hunting down specific criminals in the city, using your advanced technology and avoiding attracting too much attention - even a predator can only handle so much opposition. And your prey knows who you are and what you are capable of, so this won't be a cakewalk.

Concrete Jungle is the Predator's first solo adventure since 1990 and obviously also on a next-generation platform. It's about time. 



Please say we'll be able to slice up all those security guards, cops and other innocent bystanders...



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PlayStation 2



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Gaming is not an IQ test

words ed dracon

Much like the movie and music industry, gaming has long since fallen into the same trap of being abused as an idiotic IQ test. Something that should be consumed for fun, something that should be enjoyed as a work of art, should not be used to determine if someone is smart, or stupid. If you believe that because a person plays a certain game, they're stupid, or if someone agrees with your views on another game, they're smart, then you should be locked in a room until you realize what you've done.

But I digress. Nobody is perfect and often it is a natural impulse to turn up your nose at someone who seems to be finding too much enjoyment playing something that is just... stupid. There are parallels between that, and pulling a face at someone laughing at a stupid joke. Often it simply doesn't feel right that people can exclaim that something is so gosh darn good, when you believe it really isn't. You really, really believe it isn't.

But therein lays the start of solving the problem. Games are a form of entertainment, and entertainment has always had as much value as the consumer applies to it. Another man's decrepit examples of crumbling society may be the next man's uplifting discussion of life, love and the universe. Points of view come from a given value for its origin; different angles of perception change the references to those points. Less verbosely, we all have a different take on things.

It's time that gamers start proving that (in my optimistically naïve opinion) they're better than the pop culture-consuming music-fanatics and movie-critics, that gamers can embrace the principle that gaming is an almost religiously personal experience, that it varies from person to person. There is no one true unified answer to the concept of what a person should, or should not enjoy. Paradigms are not going to shift, while gamers are putting other gamers into boxes and trying to keep them there and this is especially true for South Africa where gaming is still taking its baby steps, trying to find a direction to go in.



EA in Oddworld

Take on the role of the Stranger, a western-style bounty hunter

Electronic Arts has acquired the global publishing rights for the next game from Oddworld Inhabitants. The game is expected next year, and will be available on PlayStation 2 and Xbox. The Oddworld series has sold almost five million titles to-date. The last title to be released in the series was Oddworld Munch's Odysee, an Xbox-exclusive published by Microsoft Game Studios in 2001.

news bits

ATARI TO REVISIT THE MATRIX

Despite the rather unenthusiastic response to Atari's Enter the Matrix, the company has decided to publish two sequels, the first to appear on current consoles, while the second will be designed for next-generation consoles. No other details have been disclosed.

RIDGE RACER

Namco will be releasing a new Ridge Racer game by March next year. The company has not announced what platforms the game will be available on.

CARMAGEDDON 4

SCI has confirmed that Carmageddon 4 is scheduled for release some time next year. No further details are available at present.

PAINKILLER EXPANSION IN THE WORKS

DreamCatcher Games will publish an expansion pack for its PC game Painkiller late this year. Painkiller: Battle Out of Hell will add a new single player chapter with 10 levels, new multiplayer modes and additional maps, models and weapons. Also included will be a map editor Software Development Kit.

Three new Fullmetal Alchemist games

SQUARE ENIX TO RELEASE GAMES BASED ON ANIME SHOW

Three new Fullmetal Alchemist games are in the works for PlayStation 2, and another for Game Boy Advance. Fullmetal Alchemist 2: Akaki Elixir no Akuma (The Demon of the Red Elixir) is the sequel to Fullmetal Alchemist and the Broken Angel, and will feature cel-shaded graphics, which will let it more closely resemble the anime series. The game will feature the central character, who can turn ordinary objects into weapons, and his computer-controlled sidekick. No release dates have been disclosed. The other PlayStation 2 game has not been named yet, but it is known that it will be a beat-'em-up type of game, allowing two-on-two battles. Fullmetal Alchemist: Omoide no Sonata (Sonata of Memories), scheduled for release on the Game Boy Advance on 22 July, is a role-playing title.

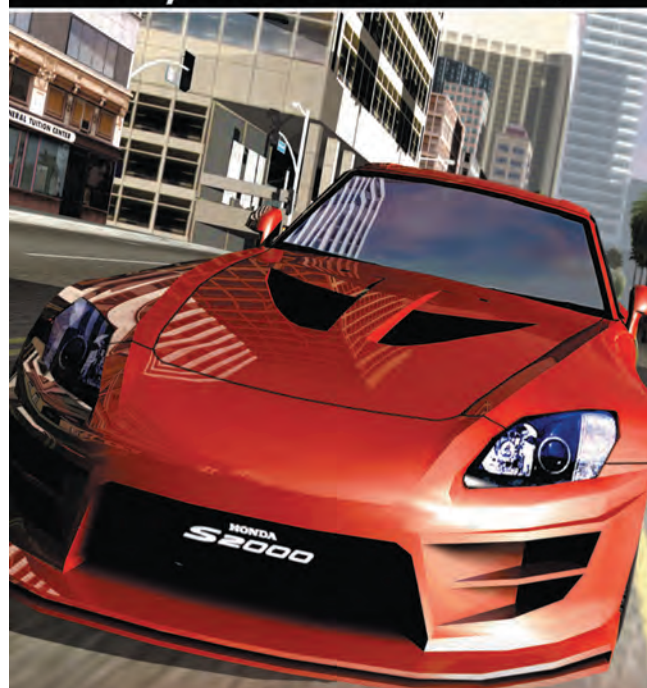


Game to include character, graphic and animation assets from the movie

March of next year will see the release of the animated feature **Robots**. A game version is in development at Eurocom Entertainment Software, to be published by Vivendi for PC, Xbox, PlayStation 2 and GameCube at the same time as the movie. A Game Boy Advance version

is also in development, at Griptonite Games. The film's and games' story lines will revolve around a world inhabited by emotionally developed robots who face an imminent takeover by an evil tyrant with nefarious designs.

PlayStation®2



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COMING SOON!

Sentinel: Descendants in Time

PC adventure game being developed by veteran adventure puzzle studio Detalion

The Adventure Company, a division of DreamCatcher Interactive, will publish Detalion's upcoming Sentinel: Descendants in Time around November. The game is an adventure with some emphasis on puzzle-solving, and will feature a non-linear dynamic and a built-in hint system for those who are struggling.



Sabre Squadron

FANCY TAKING ON MORE COVERT MISSIONS IN A SECOND WORLD WAR SETTING?

Take-Two Interactive, via its Gathering label, will release an expansion pack for Hidden and Dangerous 2 later this year. The add-on is entitled Sabre Squadron, and will offer new missions, locations, occupations, weapons and object-based multiplayer missions. In addition, it will sport enhanced AI and the ability to play single-player missions cooperatively over the Internet.

Web Scores

	[PC] True Crime: SOLA	[PC] Harry Potter: POA	[PC] Thief III: DS	[PC] CSI: Dark Motives
NAG /100	83	69	83	69
gamespy.com /5	3	n/r	4	3
gamespot.com /10	6.3	7	8.3	6.3
pc.ign.com /10	8	6	8.6	8.4
	[Xbox] Full Spectrum Warrior	[PS2] Cy Girls	[PS2] GT 4 Prologue	[PS2] UEFA Euro 2004
NAG /100	91	63	78	75
gamespy.com /5	4	n/r	n/r	4
gamespot.com /10	7.7	n/r	n/r	8.2
ign.com /10	9.2	5.8	n/r	8

Game developers rally behind Alexander the Great

ALEXANDER IS IN VOGUE

Two games, from different developers and publishers, and falling into separate genres, but both based on the campaigns of Alexander the Great, are currently in development. Seems the Macedonian king is currently in vogue. The first of these titles is Deep Silver's upcoming "3D historical real-time strategy and role-playing game" entitled Alexander the Great, in development at Meridian 93 since early this year. The game is expected to be released in November. The other title is Tin Soldiers: Alexander the Great from Koios Works, to be published by Matrix Games at an as yet undisclosed date. This latter game is a tactical simultaneous-turn-based war-game. Its aspect is one suggestive of miniature tabletop war-games, with the units being depicted as tin soldiers.



movies

GAMES AND MOVIES ARE JOINED AT THE HIP IT SEEMS

Game design staff and Godzilla

Metal Gear Solid designer Yoji Shinkawa will be heavily involved in costume and battleship design for the next Godzilla film, Final Wars. Ryuhei Kitamura, who was largely responsible for the cinematic scenes in Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes, is directing the film. Another staff member was an illustrator for the Virtua Fighter series. Godzilla: Final Wars is scheduled to debut in Japan on 4 December, and will commemorate the franchise's 50th anniversary.



Doom movie hanging again

For years now there has been talk of a Doom film, but the road has been rough. Warner Bros secured the film rights a year and a half ago; a clause of the agreement specified that if insufficient progress had been made after 15 months, the film rights would revert back to id Software. And so it has transpired. Current rumours are that Universal Studios will now get a shot, having optioned the rights. However, some obstacles still block progress, and negotiations continue. The film will be based on Doom 3, which has also seen repeated delays.

John Woo and game-inspired films

John Woo is becoming the film director who is most enthusiastic about computer game-inspired projects. He is currently involved in a Metroid based production and a movie based on Spy Hunter. He has now also signed a deal with paramount to direct a film based on Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six. Production of these movies has not started yet, and no dates have been indicated, with the exception of the Spy Hunter title, which has been tentatively scheduled for release next year.

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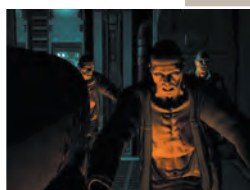
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International Release Dates



ANNO 1503 - Treasures, Monsters, and Pirates	PC	Strategy	August 1
Dark Age of Camelot: New Frontiers	PC	RPG	August 1
Galactic Civilizations: Altarian Prophecy	PC	Strategy	August 1
Knights of Honor	PC	Strategy	August 1
Madden NFL 2005	PC Xbox PS2 GC	Sports	August 1
Power Politics III	PC	Simulation	August 1
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Xbox	Shooter	August 3
Saru Eye Toy	PS2		August 5
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	GBA	Action	August 8
Def Jam: Fight for NY	GBA	Wrestling	August 9
Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders	Xbox	Strategy	August 10
Virtua Cop	NGE	Action	August 10
DOOM 3	PC	Shooter	August 13
First Strike: Grant City Anti-Crime	GC	Action	August 15
Headhunter: Redemption	Xbox PS2	Action	August 15
Syberia II	Xbox	Adventure	August 16
Armored Core: Nexus	PS2	Action	August 17
Astro Boy	PS2	Action	August 17
Digimon Rumble Arena 2	PS2	Fighting	August 17
Metal Slug Advance	GBA	Shooter	August 17
Army Men: Sarge's War	GC	Shooter	August 21
Digimon Rumble Arena 2	Xbox GC	Platformer	August 23
Digimon World 4	Xbox PS2	Action	August 23
Terminator 3: The Redemption	Xbox PS2 GC	Action	August 23
Amazing Island	GC	Simulation	August 24
Digimon Racing	GBA	Racing	August 24
Shaman King: Master of Spirits	GBA	RPG	August 24
ShellShock: Nam '67	Xbox PS2	Shooter	August 24
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	NGE	Shooter	August 24
WWE Day of Reckoning	GC	Wrestling	August 25
Anarchy Online - Alien Invasion	PC	RPG	August 29
Dragon Empires	PC	RPG	August 30
Earth 2160 Online	PC	Strategy	August 30
Lamborghini FX	PC	Racing	August 30
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	Xbox PS2	Racing	August 30
Pikmin 2	GC	Strategy	August 30
Raging Tiger: The Second Korean War	PC	Strategy	August 30
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	PC	Shooter	August 30
Street Racing Syndicate	Xbox PS2 GC	Racing	August 30
Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	PC	Adventure	August 31
Codename: Panzers	PC	Strategy	August 31
EverQuest II	PC	RPG	August 31
EyeToy: Chat	PS2	Other	August 31
Gates of Troy	PC	Strategy	August 31
GTR	PC	Racing	August 31

PlayStation 2



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rage 2004

The background of the poster is a collage of various items. At the top, a green military vehicle is shown with the text 'U.S.A. 4050337S' on its side. Below the vehicle, a rocket is positioned vertically. In the center, a yellow helmet with black goggles is visible. To the left of the helmet, a blue and yellow object, possibly a weapon or a piece of equipment, is shown. At the bottom, two video game controllers are visible, along with a handgun.

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*actual image may differ

Specification

CPU	Intel Pentium 4 3.0 GHz HT
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Case	Antec SLK
Memory	1024 MB DDR 400
HDD	Western Digital 10000rpm 36GB SATA
3D Card	ATI Radeon X800 PRO
Drive	Sony CDRW + DVD
Monitor	Samsung 17" Black Flat
Keyboard	Logitech Internet Navigator
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T-Shirt	DOOM 3 Official T-Shirt
Game	DOOM 3 + DOOM Collectors Edition

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reviews



The dry patch...

E3 may have showed us the biggest and best the industry has to offer, but now the long wait has begun...

Here at NAG we endeavour to bring you the best game reviews around. Of course, working in the magazine publishing industry means that it takes a little while for our efforts to get to you. So, while you may see some stirrings on the shelf this month, the magazine itself is caught in the post E3 lull.

Every year after E3 the game industry goes into something of a slump. One of the reasons for this comes directly down to the fact that, not that long after E3 that other world famous event - commonly called Christmas - comes along. Publishers realise the marketing potential of that time of year and, knowing that the public is gagging for all those wonderful titles, they keep things under wraps until the spending spree kicks in. A combination of Christmas and highly anticipated titles makes for a feeding frenzy amongst the game buying public, leaving the publishers with (theoretically) heaving coffers at the end of the period. Of course, the result is that very few games see the light of day leading up to that time.

There is another factor that needs to be considered, of course, before

all the rabid anti-establishment gamers start going crazy... the fact is that many of the games shown at E3 are in various stages of completion. A number, in fact, are making a repeat appearance at the show (as stated in last month's E3 supplement) and some of them may even appear at the show again.

Gamers need to remember that creating games is a long and laborious process. They take a lot of time to produce. But during that production, the highly competitive market does require that hype is built up around the title - much like happens in other industries, like the film industry, for example.

E3 is a huge hype machine. It reaches the relevant public directly, and generates some of the hype needed to market games successfully. It is not, and should never be seen as, a showcase of games that will be available in the immediate future.

Titles like Half-Life 2 and Doom 3 may have been seen at E3, but keep in mind that this is not the first time they have been there. They are still being worked on.

Just because it was shown at E3 doesn't mean it is coming soon.

In case you didn't know yet...

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Award of Excellence

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Editor's Choice

Once in a while, a game comes along that displays certain qualities which our editor likes. Pretty colours and loud noises help...



Platform

Platforms are described using icons rather than just plain old words. For those of you who don't know (shame on you) they are, left to right, top to bottom: Game Boy Advance, GameCube, N-Gage, PC, PS2 and Xbox.



Scoring

As we said, our scores range from one to one hundred, with a score of fifty being considered average - because we can. Live with it.

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Thief 3: Deadly Shadows



PC
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 • **Developer:** Ion Storm • **Publisher:** Eidos
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 • **Genre:** Sneaker • **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 4 1.5GHz • 256 MB RAM • 4 x CD ROM • 64 MB Video Card • 3 GB HDD

At one stage hardcore fans of the Thief series uttered a collective groan when the original developers behind the stealth sneaker disappeared from the gaming world. That was round about just after Thief 2 was released. Publishers Eidos Interactive, though have moved projects around before, and the success of the Thief series meant that another developer was found to expand on the title. And who better, in Eidos' eyes anyhow, than Deus Ex developers Ion Storm. And so fans have a new Thief title to look forward to.

Thief 3: Deadly Shadows revisits the strange and complex steam-punk milieu popularised in the previous games. And yes, master thief Garrett is there again, ready to be lead on some more stealthy adventures by the player.

Thief 3: Deadly Shadows is, as to be expected, a dark tale full of betrayal

and intrigue. What else could it really be? Without going into too much detail, the player can expect the usual "I'm being used by someone here" feeling that goes hand in hand with Thief. In this new incarnation, though, far more flexibility has been introduced story wise (and replay wise) depending on the way the player interacts with the various factions within Garrett's home city. This does smack quite heavily of Deus Ex, of course, but the game is not, as many worried, a medieval version of that well loved cyber-punk game. In fact, the spirit of Thief is beautifully captured by the new development team.

For those unfamiliar with the Thief series, never fear... this isn't a case of not knowing what the hell is going on if you haven't played the previous games. The story is pretty much self-contained and, although knowing the previous tales does help enhance the

overall story, it isn't necessary to draw maximum enjoyment from this new title.

There have been, obviously, some changes to the game with the introduction of Ion Storm, but these tend to be enhancements rather than vast idea switches.

The most noticeable change comes in the form of graphics. It certainly isn't the prettiest game around, and the dark nature of the game does often prevent a player from reaching a full appreciation of the title's visuals, but there is a definite increase in the overall graphic quality since Thief 2.

Models are more detailed, as are settings and - working wonders for the overall ambiance - lighting effects have been spruced up a huge amount.

Another change that is not quite as noticeable but is still there is the overall AI of the game. The enemies are more alert, and a lot smarter. They still




actively seek the player out, but they are better at spotting movement and a player hiding in shadows with someone looking for him will more than likely be found.

The overall dynamic and idea behind the game hasn't changed at all. You are still a thief, and the aim is still getting in and out of various places with a minimum of violence and disturbance. In fact, getting into a fight situation generally spells doom for the player. The player's character simply isn't equipped, physically or otherwise, to deal with toe to toe fighting. Sneaky kills (although frowned on) and knock outs are this game's style. Avoiding the light is paramount, so items like water arrows (which put out torches) are still included. Other things like flash-bombs to temporarily blind enemies and moss arrows to create a quiet walking surface are also available.

This game is slick and requires the player to pay careful attention to even the smallest details. Nothing can be taken for granted - if you want to sell

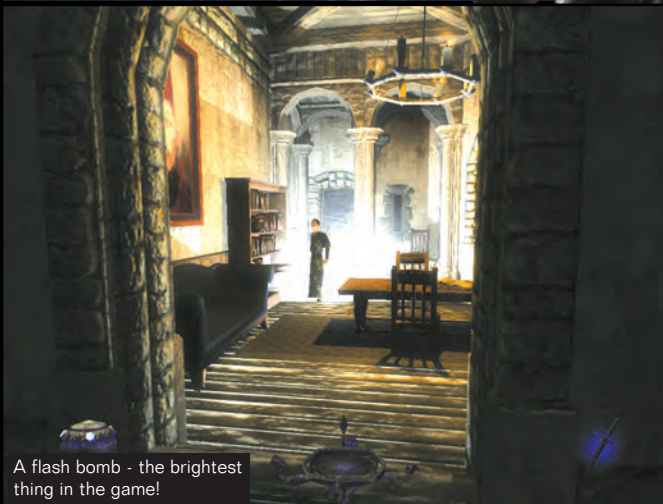
your loot or get new equipment, you have to do it in-game. A comprehensive and well handled control system allows the player to achieve all of this. But, inherently, this game expects a hell of a lot from the player: patience, accuracy and quick wits. Don't expect Thief 3: Deadly Shadows to be a forgiving title; that never has been, and is still not, the nature of the beast. If you mess up in Thief 3, you had better come up with a plan really quickly, or face the reload button...

Another good reason for patience is that a lot of the story (and clues to interesting sub-quests) is revealed by way of overheard dialogue. Sitting in the shadows and listening to a conversation is always a good idea in this game (as is breaking into arbitrary buildings... never know what you'll find.) Thankfully a lot of time and effort went into the voice acting, so you don't have to cringe at the conversations you are listening to.

Thief 3: Deadly Shadows is certainly not everyone's cup of tea. A quick brain is far more useful than a fast trigger finger in this game, and the player will need to have God Mode enabled if a run and gun attitude is foremost in his mind. It's still one of the best sneakers ever, and Thief 3: Deadly Shadows will prove a massively rewarding experience to anyone who plays it as it's meant to be played. 

The ultimate sneaker is back with an excellent story and lots of challenging situations.

83



A flash bomb - the brightest thing in the game!

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban



PC
Review

Surprisingly few expected JK Rowling's books about a nerdy kid who gets to go to a wizard school to be so very popular, yet it makes sense. Let's take school, something most people hate, and turn it into a magical experience that almost anyone could want. Rowling put a lot of creativity and ingenuity into her books, yet so far the games have not followed suit. Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban is the latest in the movie-to-game translations, managing to be the best Harry Potter game yet, but still not as good as we would like.

A lot of improvements have been made, both graphically and in terms of game mechanics. You now control (at

parts) Harry as well as Ron and Hermione together, allowing you to cast more powerful versions of your spells so as to unlock certain doors or defeat certain creatures. All the expected bits from the movie are there, flying Buckbeak and defeating the Dementors, though each event seems slightly pale in contrast. Running around Hogwarts from class to class then completing missions should be fun and often is, but it feels like the developers didn't quite know what to do (in stark contrast to the PS2 version of the game, which is a completely different game altogether). Very short, it shouldn't take you more than a day to complete.

Not as imaginative as it could have been, but better than the prequels.

69



New found, short lived freedom



PlayStation 2
Review

It's a treat when developers really try to make a game worthy of a movie license (based on a popular book). Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban may not be the perfect game, but it certainly does the Harry Potter license more justice than any of the titles before it, or even it's PC counterpart. The game has a more stealth-oriented approach to Hogwarts; Harry has to use the Marauder's Map (showing the locations of teachers and which way they are facing) and his athletic ability to sneak

around. You can swap to Ron (who can see magical walls) or Hermione (who's knowledge of spells makes her useful in spell-heavy situations) at times to use their innate abilities to achieve what Harry can't. As you progress, you learn more powerful spells to help you get to new areas.

Events throughout the game are imaginative and fun, even the intense Duelling club is included, letting you combat opponents in a spell battle. The Sony EyeToy support adds a fun component to the game, letting up to 4

players try to catch the Snitch or splat chocolate frogs. Mini-games get unlocked as the game progresses, each one themed after a specific part of the movie. Overall, graphically and with the thought put into the whole package, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban is the best the license has seen so far.

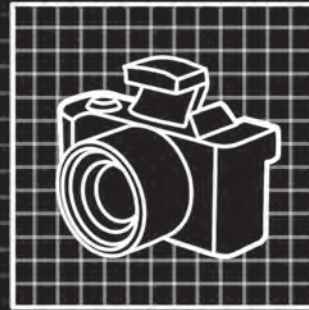
Definitely the best Harry Potter game yet, innovative and fun.

75



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CSI: Dark Motives



PC
Review

CSI is a very popular show on television. Its edgy style on forensic investigation is imaginative and entertaining. In a rare occurrence, the sequel to the previous CSI game (based on the previous season) manages to capture exactly the same atmosphere. In fact, it's very much like playing an episode of the show, just less acting. CSI: Dark Motives is a first-person adventure game that's quite taxing on the nerves and intellect. As you examine crime scenes, question witnesses and analyze evidence utilizing the latest in forensic equipment you have to tie the victim to the crime scene as well as the suspect in a triangular scheme. In-depth evidence examination is new to this sequel; you have to actually visually compare fingerprints as well as other bits of evidence.

The game mechanics remain unchanged from the prequel; as a new CSI operative you have to go scour crime scenes for evidence which usually involves moving your mouse slowly across every part of the screen, unless you actually notice irregularities right off the bat. Using detection/collection tools, you gather evidence and talk to suspects. As you find more evidence, you can ask the suspects more poignant questions and eventually link the suspect to the crime scene to the victim. The case-file interface of the game has improved making it easier to see if you've got everything you need, if not your partner is always there to give you suggestions (at the cost of final score).

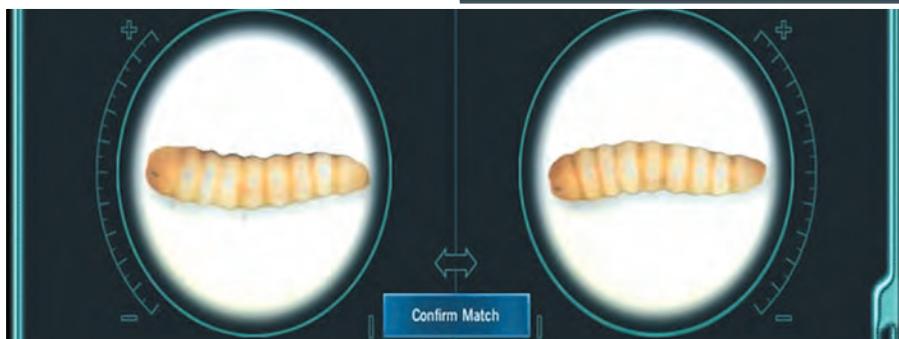
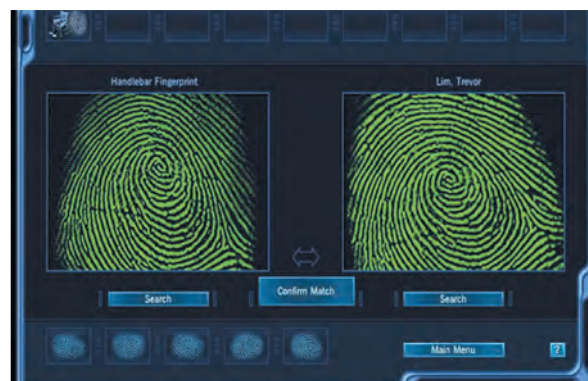
The likenesses and voices of the entire CSI cast are present again, as well as the rest of the authenticity such as the show's locations, music, writing, scientific validity and visual style. The five new cases are longer and more in-

depth than the original game which is certainly a good thing, but the cases are also much more difficult. One case in CSI: Dark Motives requires almost as much effort, time and thinking than the entire previous game. All the forensic tools are back such as the fingerprint dusters while a few new ones enter the scene such as the DNA sequencer. If you've ever had the urge to try your hand at what you see the cast of CSI do each show, then CSI: Dark Motives is an accurate and intelligent reproduction of exactly that. Progression through the game with high crime-solving scores will unlock interesting bits of content such as obscure trivia as well as behind-the-scenes clips. [N](#)

For a game where you move your mouse over every small part of the screen, it's more interesting than it sounds.

69

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** 361 Interactive · **Publisher:** Ubisoft
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** Puzzle · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 2 600MHz · 256 MB RAM · 16 x CD ROM · 16 MB Video Card · 650 MB HDD



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True Crime: Streets of LA



PC
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 • **Developer:** Luxoflux • **Publisher:** Activision
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 • **Genre:** Action • **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 800 MHz • 128 MB RAM • 8 x CD ROM • 32 MB Video Card
 3.1 GB HDD

When a game is ported from one platform to another, one often expects lacklustre results either because of developer laziness or other factors. Luckily, though, the transition of True Crime: Streets of LA from PS2 to PC has been as smooth as silk.


For those not familiar with the title, it breaks down something like this. The player controls Nick Kang, a streetwise and somewhat rebellious cop on the trail of some triad bad guys. It's that simple. But what makes the game so much fun to play is the GTA3 style of play dynamic.

True Crime is hard to categorise, because it features driving, shooting and fighting challenges, much like GTA 3. Only the tongue in cheek nature of that game is not really evident: True Crime is a far more serious affair.

The interesting story is broken down into a number of episodes, with each episode comprising a few missions. Some missions are very specific - race to get to point A, beat the tar out of bad guy B, that kind of thing. For the most part, though, the missions are incredibly free form, allowing the player more than enough time to cruise through the streets of LA and solve random crimes that pop up with alarming regularity. Some will be muggings, others may be dangerous shoot outs, or

even manic car chases. With Nick on foot, the player can even frisk civilians (here's a tip - the guilty ones never look at the character) and "appropriate" civilian vehicles... which is essentially a nice way of saying hijacking.

Through solving crimes, the player earns points, which later translate into shields. Each shield can buy the player an attempt at one of three (shooting, fighting or driving) upgrades, spread throughout the city and a number of locations. Successfully completing all the sections of an episode also earns a chance for a special upgrade, as well as some extra cruising time. And if you fail a mission - the story still rolls on, regardless, but with a slightly different slant. A nice touch, that is.

Good graphics, standardised controls, excellent sound and voice acting (plus a kick-butt sound track) makes this a highly enjoyable game and, with features like multiplayer modes and (of course) the open ended nature of "cruising for crime", True Crime: Streets of LA is a game that will keep the player busy for a good long (and very enjoyable) time. 

Second Opinion

At face value, True Crime appears to be nothing more than a combination of Grand Theft Auto and Dead To Rights. Delving deeper into the game exposes an offering that mixes B-grade detective clichés with an amazing hip-hop soundtrack. Adding to this is Los Angeles that has so faithfully been reproduced that it gives the player 240 square miles to explore between missions. Anyone who has ever played Mafia will instantly recognise the game dynamic behind True Crime. It combines driving, shooting and fighting elements to produce a title that will keep players busy for many hours. A definite must-buy.

Iwan Pienaar 85%

Crime fighting adventure in a GTA 3 style.

83



Nick knows all the latest dance moves...





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Soldiers: Heroes of World War II



PC
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 • **Developer:** Best Way • **Publisher:** Codemasters
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 • **Genre:** Strategy • **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 1GHz • 256 MB RAM • 4 x CD ROM • 32 MB Video Card • 2 GB HDD

Russians 1C are starting to make waves by introducing new concepts to old gaming genres. Recently we saw Perimeter, which bore their name, and had a few new approaches to the world of real time strategy gaming. Now, with Soldiers: Heroes of World War II, we once again see a new approach to something that has been tried before.


Soldiers: Heroes of World War II is ostensibly a strategy title, using squad based tactics - very similar in concept to the Commandos series. But concept is where the similarity ends. This game takes the idea of squad based gaming and gives the player a whole new task to fulfil, should he so choose... the task of helping units shoot. It's called direct control and, basically, it turns the mouse cursor into an aiming device when turned on. It can be activated at any time during the game, and for any

unit. Infantrymen benefit by getting help in hitting enemies (and selecting the right enemies to hit) and vehicles get the benefit of being steered by the player, as well as getting the added weapon assistance.

As the name implies, the game takes the whole battle down to a more individual level. Indeed, some missions pit the player's one or two units against a veritable army full of enemies. It doesn't sound easy, and it isn't. Even at the most simple levels, Soldiers is a very challenging game. It is very demanding, and careless play will result in mission failure - more readily so than many titles on the market.

Good graphics support this game wonderfully - additionally, a physics engine to die for means terrain that can be remodelled (i.e. blown to bits, driven through and generally mangled) as well as smarter battle handling. The player will need to remember that, for

example, tanks are more vulnerable from the side or behind than from the front. A well placed AP shell can make the difference between victory and defeat, so the player will need to take a great many factors into consideration before loosing the big guns.

Soldiers: Heroes of World War II features a capable camera and easy to use controls, as well as an individual inventory system (for soldiers and vehicles) and a number of other factors that make it a breath of fresh air in the strategy market. It's one of the best I have seen but, be warned, this title can get incredibly frustrating. 

A new approach to squad based WWII strategy - tough but great fun.

82



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The Suffering



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 • **Developer:** Surreal Software • **Publisher:** Midway
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 • **Genre:** Action Horror • **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: 1 Player • Analog Compatible • Vibration Compatible

Japan may have the greater portion of the survival horror market, but that doesn't keep others from trying. Take *The Suffering*, for example; this offering from Midway attempts to take on the distinct style of Japanese horror games and add a little western flavour to the whole idea.

The resulting game is a disturbing trip through the world's nastiest prison as you fight off a bevy of horrible monsters - designed by Stan Winston.

The player controls a character named Torque, a man sent to prison for murdering his family (whether he did or not is another story.) Set in a maximum security penitentiary, *The Suffering* features the foul language and attitude that one may expect from Oz, combined with the gore and monsters of any of a number of slasher horrors. In fact, the game is far more slasher than survival in nature. The

twelve different monsters can be taken on with ten different weapons, ranging from a shiv right through to a Tommy gun. Additionally, Torque can take on a rage-fuelled monstrous form to deal out a bit more damage.

The Suffering does have its frights and its scary moments, but it lacks the chill of titles like *Silent Hill* and *Resident Evil*. The player will be far less prone to panic - this game lends itself far more towards nervousness than outright fear. The frights are enhanced by "flashes" of imagery that can be quite disturbing.

The *Suffering* can be played in either third or first person perspective, lending a nice degree of versatility to a sometimes annoying control system. Movement is ok, but doing battle against the monsters (who represent various methods of execution) can get a bit finicky.

A rather nice aspect of the game is in the way it's played. During the game,

Torque constantly runs into decisions that can determine whether he is good or bad. Voices from either side of the spectrum can also be heard advising him during the game (like an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other.) The end result is one of three game endings, depending on how the game was played all along. This adds some replay value to the game.

Overall, *The Suffering* is an enjoyable game, if a bit disturbing. It certainly is not for younger players, what with its foul language and excessive gore.

It may not be a survival horror, but this foul-mouthed, gory horror title has a good number of frights.

79

Name Dropping

So who the hell is Stan Winston, the man responsible for designing *The Suffering's* creatures? He is one of Hollywood's top creature designers, and you've probably

seen more of his work than you knew. The following is a list of films for which Mr Winston did designs and creature effects:

Big Fish
Terminator 1, 2 and 3
The Time Machine
A.I.
Jurassic Park 1, 2 and 3
Galaxy Quest
End of Days
Sixth Sense
Lake Placid
Interview with the Vampire
Edward Scissorhands
Alien Nation
Predator 1 and 2
Aliens
The Entity
The Thing

This list is by no means exhaustive, and doesn't include TV and commercial work. For the last 30 years or so, Stan Winston has been one of the leading creature designers in the industry.



You may be ugly,
but I am meaner!





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Project Zero 2: Crimson Butterfly



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 • **Developer:** Tecmo • **Publisher:** Tecmo
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 4900 • **Genre:** Survival Horror • **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Player • 60KB Memory


Survival Horror is an under-used and under-appreciated genre, yet the titles produced for it often suffer from the same 'clone' syndrome that the massive First Person Shooter market has. Each successive game feels and plays much like the previous, stunting the growth of the genre. Fatal Frame 2 (a.k.a. Rei Zero or Project Zero) is actually a prequel of the events that occurred in the first game and continues the interesting idea behind the first game, attempting to break the mould of your standard Survival Horror by adding slightly more action than per usual.

As you follow the story of twin sisters trapped in a Lost Village (a generation before the story of Himuro's Mansion of the first game), you are introduced to the Camera Obscura and its mystical powers. The camera is the gem of this title, adding exactly what the game

needs to make it stand out from the crowd. As you encounter ghosts (no zombies here) you have to switch to a first-person mode and 'take pictures' of the ghosts to reduce their power and ultimately trap them inside the camera. The actual process of taking the photos is frantic and intense, especially if you attempt to take 'Zero Shots' (taking a photo of the ghost right before it attacks you).

Following a crimson butterfly (hence the title), the two sisters eventually get separated and the story starts taking a headlong dive into dark rituals gone bad and various time/space alterations. Much like a traditional Role Playing Game, you can use experience to upgrade the Camera Obscura to give it more power, better capturing abilities and such. You can also find upgrades to the camera and better film, certain types of film work better for certain situations. The actual 'com-

bat' using the camera often feels like a First Person Shooter, the pictures you take of the ghosts can actually be saved to the memory card.

Fans of the genre won't be disappointed; Project Zero 2 contains all the trimmings of a classic. Newcomers might be intrigued by the interesting angle of the combat system, but quickly get annoyed at the initial slow pacing of the game. Progression through the game is a rollercoaster ride of puzzles (where you usually have to take a photo of something specific to unlock a door), ghosts and the frustration of seeing your twin sister get harassed by a ghost you can't defeat. 

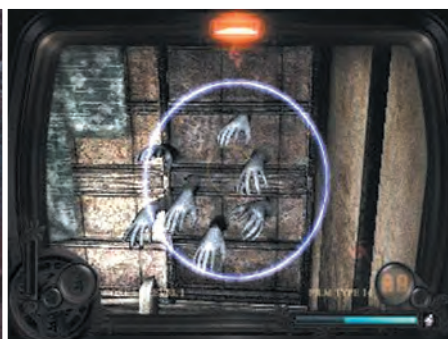
An interesting variation on the standard Survival Horror fare.

71



Who you gonna call?

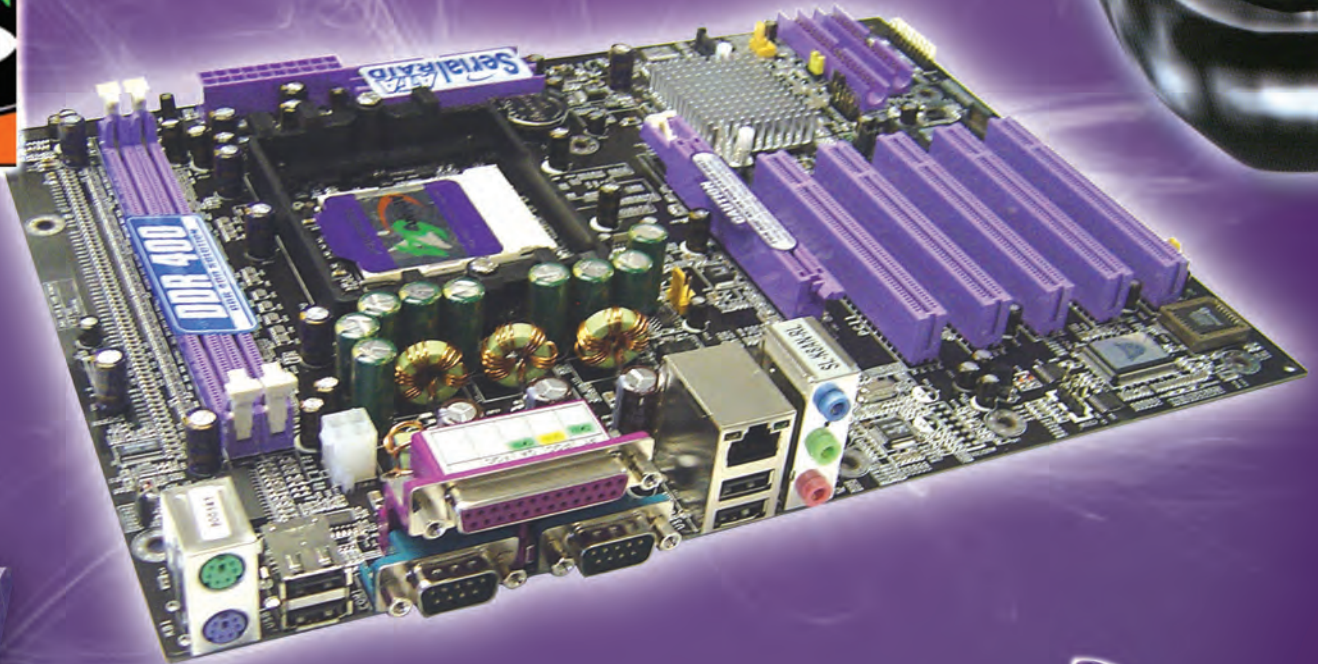
The developer of Fatal Frame, Tecmo, was quickly sued by the movie company behind Ghostbusters, claiming that the idea of capturing ghosts in a camera infringed upon the concept of Ghostbusters. The case was later dropped.



"You should really see a chiropractor..."



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Full Spectrum Warrior



Xbox
Review



Gold
Award

Suggested Retail Price: TBA · **Developer:** Pandemic Studios · **Publisher:** THQ
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Tactical Realtime Strategy · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Offline · 2 Online on Xbox Live


Pandemic Studios created a light infantry-training simulator for the U.S Army as a tool to reinforce Army doctrine and squad tactics among troops.

Full Spectrum Warrior is not that game, but it's based on it so heavily you can almost taste the drill sergeant swearing as he drills you in tactical infantry warfare. Full Spectrum Warrior is not, as initial impressions led us to think, a 3rd person action title. Instead, it's a squad-based, tactical-action game that resembles the traditional Real Time Strategy titles heavily. Using squad level command in the head of battle, it simulates the challenges of today's urban combat missions with a level of realism and accuracy that's both spot-on yet nicely paced.

Essentially, you are in control of two squads, Alpha and Bravo. Each squad has four unique members, ranging from team-leader to heavy weapons.

You control one squad at a time, but can swap between squads on the fly. Controlling a squad involves moving them via a cursor to a specific location, but that's where the Real Time Strategy conventions end abruptly. There is a heavy context-sensitive underline to moving your squad; moving them close to the corner of a building puts them in a specific optimal formation, moving them behind a car has them form up alongside it, using it for cover. When you reach the corner, the team-leader will peek around it and call out the locations of enemies. You can then attempt to engage, but if the enemy has cover you won't make it. Using suppression fire, you can pin them down so that they won't shoot your second team crossing the street, which you will then use to flank the enemy.

Every small detail in the game, from the crows that scatter into the air at the sound of gunfire to the idle banter

between your team-members, is meticulous and stunning. Locations are detailed and contain ample eye candy. Cooperative play is supported, but only on Xbox Live. The only major point of contention could be that after the Training segment of the game, you've seen all the possible moves and procedures your soldiers are capable of. This makes sense, since you'd want to go into battle knowing all your options, though some might not like the lack of 'surprises'. Full Spectrum Warrior is not an easy game and despite what may seem like a simplistic premise, manages to contain enough depth and atmosphere to make it a truly sterling title. 

Tactical Real Time Strategy has never looked this good.

91

All the moves

There is a plethora of intelligent moves at your disposal, making sure you bring your troops back alive. You can engage an enemy and 'fire for effect' so as to cover your other team as they try to cross

the street. Suppression fire eats ammunition but makes the enemy unable to move. You can move from point to point, covering certain directions so as to not be surprised by the enemy. Smoke grenades help confuse enemies so you can cross dangerous areas without getting shot.



Simple rule of combat: You can't shoot what you can't see

Gran Turismo 4: Prologue



PlayStation 2
Review


Suggested Retail Price: R 379.00 · **Developer:** Polyphony · **Publisher:** SCEE
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Driving · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Requirements: 1 - 2 Players · Analog compatible · Vibration compatible

Fans are seldom patient creatures - especially when the thing they're waiting for is said to be the "next big thing" - and for this reason creators of Gran Turismo 4, Polyphony, have decided to release a little taster of things to come. A pre-feast appetiser, if you will. At least, they decided to release it in Japan only, but the rest of the world started throwing all kinds of toys out of various cots until the release of Gran Turismo 4: Prologue was announced for the whole world. The result is a sort of extended PS2 demo featuring all the engine upgrades that will make Gran Turismo 4 the great game it promises to be.

The whole question is, though, if this game can really be touted as a must have title. In truth, I would hazard a guess at no.

Gran Turismo 4: Prologue contains certain elements that will not be featured in the final title, which does add to its appeal. But it is a very limited game, with few modes and tracks, and only a small portion of the vast array of vehicles on offer in the final product.

And, as is to be expected, the player is required to perform a number of tests to unlock better vehicles and playing modes. The big question is whether these achievements, carried by the PS2 memory card, will be taken into account by the final game. This would allow players to get something of a head start on the pack. If not, then Prologue seems to be something of a waste of time.

I may seem very negative towards the title, but in truth it's the marketing ideas behind it that have me a little riled up. The game itself promises a lot from the final product. It is a slick, graphically beautiful vehicular tour de force that lives up to the Gran Turismo name in every way. In truth, it is a wonderful glimpse into what is to come, and true fans of the series should, by rights, own it. Those that are merely thinking of having the final title, though, should carefully think about their purchase. 

It's little more than a glorified demo, but fun to play.

78



It may be short, but it sure is pretty...

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The Haunted Mansion



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 399.00 · **Developer:** High Voltage · **Publisher:** TDK Mediactive
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Adventure · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1 Player · 60KB Memory · Analog: sticks only · Vibration compatible

Disney games are becoming rare these days, though over the years, they have proven not only to be consistently family-friendly, but also of a rather high standard and, thankfully, The Haunted Mansion is no exception. The game which, in case you're wondering, has nothing to do with the movie of the same name, sees you assuming the role of Zeke, a newly employed caretaker at an estate in the south of America. However, all is not as it seems, and Zeke learns that his

employers are, in fact, a group of ghosts looking for someone to free the mansion from the clutches of the evil spirit Atticus Thorn. To aid him in his quest, Zeke is equipped with a lantern, which not only fires projectiles at enemies, but also captures "friendly" spirits, who can then be released from Atticus's evil. The mansion consists of a multitude of rooms, with the same basic principle applying to each - you enter the room, tackle evil spirits and complete puzzles in an effort to reach and activate the light switch (which chases

away further evil spirits), and then search for the friendly ghosts. Thankfully, much variety and imagination is present in the puzzles, preventing the game from becoming tedious, and making it rather addictive. Nicely detailed graphics and atmospheric sound round out the package, making this one of the better adventure titles around.

Typical high-quality Disney fare, addictive play dynamic and safe for the whole family, too.

75



Cy Girls



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 · **Developer:** Konami · **Publisher:** Konami
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Minimum Specifications: 1 Player · 199KB Memory · Analog: sticks only · Vibration compatible

Cy Girls, based on a Japanese toy and cartoon franchise, and built on the inarguably solid Metal Gear Solid 2 engine, follows the tales of two characters, namely the hacker Ice and ninja Aska, on their individual quests to save the world from evil conglomerates. The game is spread across two discs, with one devoted to each character's escapades, though the basic play dynamic is consistent for both: aside from the mandatory encounters with a myriad of generic foes, and a few boss fights, you'll find most of your time is spent completing puzzles typical to the action genre, usually involving traversing the level several times with the ultimate aim of unlocking a certain door. One relatively innovative addition, however, comes in the presence of a "cyber world" into which either character can venture by accessing certain terminals at various points around the level. The cyber-world levels mimic the real world lev-

els, and actions performed there affect the real-world, adding extra depth to the game's puzzles. Also present in the cyber-world is a type of combat bearing an eerie resemblance to that seen in The Matrix, which is in no way a bad thing. Sadly though, the play dynamic tends to be overly

reliant on the puzzles, which soon become very tedious and frustrating. Visual mediocrity and far-from-excellent voice acting compound the problem, and it soon becomes apparent that despite Konami's reputation for quality, Cy Girls is more a missed opportunity than a must-play title. It isn't dreadful, but it certainly couldn't have been much, much better.

Often frustrating action title that seems little more than an exercise in wasted potential.

63



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 • **Developer:** Konami • **Publisher:** Konami
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 • **Genre:** Action • **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Minimum Specifications: 1-2 Players • 57KB Memory • Analog: sticks only • Vibration compatible

The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, having been nothing less than an utter phenomenon in the early 90's, have been on somewhat of a hiatus lately, but hot on the heels of a new cartoon series based on their escapades, Konami have released a scrolling beat 'em up featuring none other than our favourite mutant green heroes. Anyone who remembers titles such as Double Dragon or Golden Axe will instantly feel very familiar with the game mechanics of Teenage Mutant Ninja

Turtles, though some might feel more comfortable likening it to Tekken's Force mode - having chosen one of the four turtles, you proceed to make your way through a number of locations, facing wave after wave of almost mindless generic enemies, with a few boss fights scattered around for good measure. There are also a few points at which you'll find yourself in Master



Splinter's dojo, and given a task such as breaking a certain number of boxes within a time limit to unlock a new attack.

Also on offer is a co-operative version of the first person mode, where you can have a friend take control of a second turtle, as well as a one-on-one versus mode.

Although the play dynamic manages to be entertaining at first, the game becomes repetitive - there's only so much fun you can have annihilating almost limitless numbers of virtually identical enemies - and ends up being more of a chore than an enjoyable experience. Fans of the new TV series, TMNT might prove worthwhile; anyone else is advised to try it before forking out.



It's all out cell shaded action!



Scrolling beat 'em up might please fans of the show, but too tedious for most.

67

UEFA Euro 2004



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 • **Developer:** EA Sports • **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Supplier: EA Africa [011] 516 8300 • **Genre:** Football • **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Minimum Specifications: 1-8 Players • 339KB Memory • Analog: sticks only • Vibration compatible

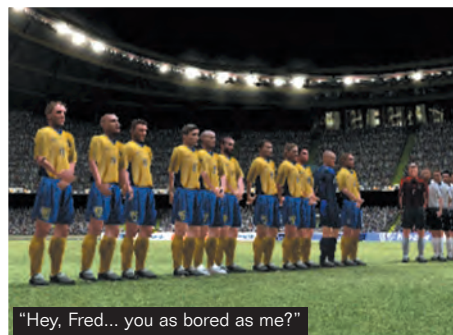
EA Sports have become notorious for releasing football titles left, right and centre, particularly when they get a chance to cash in on the World Cup or UEFA Euro tournaments in addition to the annual FIFA title. Released just in time for the start of Euro 2004, EA Sports' latest offering allows you to take control of any one of 51 UEFA countries, and guide them from the qualifying stages to the finals of the tournament itself. In addition to the Euro 2004 mode, also on offer are a num-

ber of other game modes, including the penalty shoot-out, a fantasy mode (where you draft a team from the entire roster of players from all available countries), and a situation mode, allowing you to set the score-line, time remaining, and number of players carded on each time. The play dynamic is virtually identical to that found in FIFA 2004, and anyone having spent some time with that title will have no trouble picking up and playing UEFA Euro 2004. Having said that, on account of being limited to European

sides, it follows that Euro 2004 lacks the depth of this year's FIFA title, and this might limit its appeal to those who aren't interested in the tournament itself. Nonetheless, in its own right, Euro 2004 is a solid and enjoyable football title, in the arcade style typical of its predecessors, and fans of the series will likely not be disappointed.

Entertaining arcade-style football title, but lacks the depth of FIFA 2004.

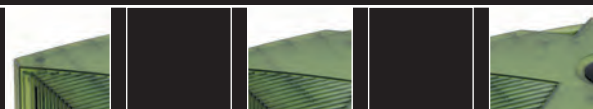
75



"Hey, Fred... you as bored as me?"



Tech Musings: Specs: King of the Moot



words james francis

The Xbox Next specs have been leaked! Have you seen them yet? Three RISC Processors! Or was that four? Not that it matters - Microsoft will deny it anyway, just like they did the last time. Yes, it's the second time that supposed Xbox 2 specs have been 'leaked'. And these latest ones seem authentic, but mainly because they don't look wrong. I used that logic in high school algebra and it didn't serve me that well.

But why would anyone really care about the power of the next Xbox console, or any of the other consoles for that matter? I can think of a few reasons, the most prominent and obvious being that it gives you an idea of what kind of games to expect. Or does it? Let's consider this for a second: larger hardware means that the graphics will be better and the games will be able to handle more physics calculations and all related things. But we already have good graphics and our machines can handle heavy calculations to enrich the game world. Even if the next generation of consoles are in fact battered shoe boxes, we can accept the fact that they will have to do a better job than their predecessors. That means they will have better graphics and more power - if they don't they are going to fail miserably. And logically the next generation of games will be better. HOW MUCH better? You tell me.

Still, we want specs. We are dying for specs! Everyone is salivating over the specs of the PSP and DS, but to what point? Can we really determine what these machines are going to be capable of through their hardware designs? Not unless you are some kind of hardware maven who knows the intricacies of software development.

John Carmack is, and every now and then he complains about the over-hyped status of dual processing. Meanwhile our eyes are glistening over with the prospect of four processors on a console. My money says Carmack has a better idea of what to look for than we do, but we lavish on the idea that quantity means quality. A game with high specifications must obviously be a pretty thing. I guess you never loaded Halo onto your PC then.

Specs are not a benchmark anymore - they've become a trap, ironically in the console world as well. And we love running after these, thinking we're onto something.



Hardware review of the ASUS A8V Deluxe Motherboard

In our July 2004 issue we reviewed the ASUS A8V Deluxe motherboard. It was incorrectly stated that the motherboard package is supplied with an Athlon 64 3500+ processor. The CPU was kindly arranged by ASUS for purposes of the motherboard review and does not ship with the motherboard. Our apologies to ASUS for the error. www.asus.com

Siemens SX1 McLaren Formula 1 Limited Edition

Siemens has released the McLaren branded SX1, a smart phone featuring black styling, still camera, video recording capability, 65000 colour screen, radio streaming, integrated MP3 player and a bundle of business tools. www.siemens-mobile.com



ASUS external DVD rewriter

ASUS has introduced the DRW-0804P-D external DVD rewriter. It can be connected via either USB2.0 or IEEE1394, and is compatible with both DVD-R/RW and DVD+R/RW formats, both at 8X. www.asus.com

> Wireless and waterproof portable TV

Casio's new XFER XF-1000 is a wireless, waterproof portable TV that can be used in the bath or swimming pool. It boasts a 10" screen with 640x480 resolution and a battery life of up to 3 hours. The tuner base unit can be connected to video sources such as DVD players and the like, and the screen can be taken up to 30 metres from the base unit before the signal vanishes.



nyko Digi-Cam SP

This little camera accessory is designed for use with the Game Boy Advance SP, and is a direct descendent of the company's previous WormCam. The unit holds 20 images and has a motion-detecting mode of use and a built-in sun filter.

Hearing without wearing

Nyko Technologies has introduced an alternative to traditional headsets, for use with the Xbox, particularly with Live online games. The device is a speaker and microphone set that mounts on the controller, instead of being a headset. This effectively eliminates the discomfort caused by prolonged wearing of a headset, though it does add to the weight of the controller. www.nyko.com



AOpen MVP multimedia player

AOpen's new MVP audio and video player supports image browsing and can be connected to an output device such as a TV, monitor or projector. It supports MP3 and WMA audio formats, MPEG video and JPEG images. It is compatible with all major forms of flash media, and can be fitted with a 2.5" or 1.8" hard disk. The unit is compact and fairly light (200g), and is bundled with a remote control and comprehensive range of connectors.

> Controller gloves

A range of console controller gloves has become available, designed to wrap a user's hands around a controller, thus reducing stress resulting from holding the controller, and absorbing sweat. These novelties are available for PlayStation (original and 2), Xbox and GameCube controller designs. www.glovesplay.com



iMAC AirPort Extreme

A wireless solution for the fashion fundy. The AirPort Extreme will allow you to have a 802.11g wireless network up and running with up to 50 Mac and PC users connected at one time, as well as allowing internet connectivity for each user. The Base Station has DSL, cable modem or LAN ports, and with the AirPort Extreme card installed in your system, you are able to access other devices on the network such as printers. For additional range on your network you can also set up a second base station using wireless bridging, which eliminates the need for cables.

This product is being distributed in South Africa by Mexcom SA [011] 791 7975.

iMAC AirPort Extreme Base Station with modem: R2,568.00

iMAC AirPort Extreme Base Station without modem: R 2,105.00

AirPort Extreme Card: R 1,140.00

www.imac.com/airportextreme



Maxtor SATA MaXLine III series

Maxtor's new SATA MaXLine III is aimed primarily at the corporate market. The hard drives feature 16MB buffers and load-balancing technology. They spin at 7200rpm and are available in 250GB and 300GB variants. Mean time till failure: 1 million hours.

www.mexcomsa.com

Anything but square.



LG Electronics HDD/DVD recorder

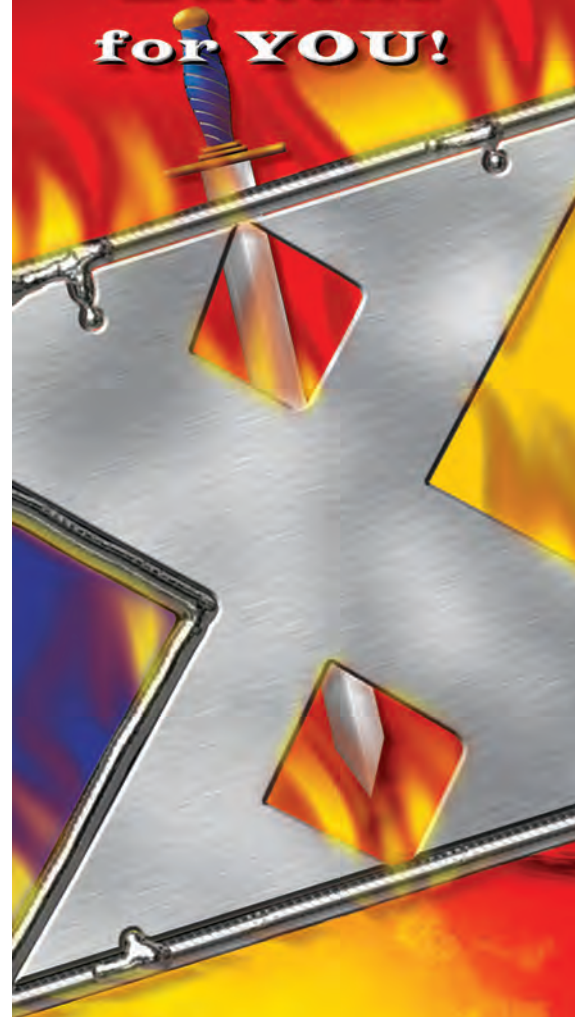
LG Electronics has introduced its RH4920W hard drive/DVD recorder into the South African market. The device can record TV programmes onto its 80GB hard drive, as well as transferring recordings to DVD. It is compatible with a very wide range of CD and DVD media, and allows image browsing and music playback in addition to its video functionality. An innovative feature named "Timeshift" allows users to negate interruptions - if called away from a programme, activating the feature will begin recording; the programme can then be watched from the point of interruption - the recorder will keep recording and playing back simultaneously. Furthermore, DVDs can be watched while a programme is being recorded, and picture-in-picture functionality allows monitoring everything. The RH4920W also sports a memory multi-slot, which supports a variety of flash memory media used by cameras and camcorders. This appliance should be retailing for around R4500.



ASUS NCCH-DL motherboard

ASUS has introduced the first dual-Xeon (Nocona) motherboard running on the Intel 875P chipset. Features include 800MHz FSB, 1MB of L2 cache, dual-channel DDR400 support, onboard gigabit LAN and no less than six SATA ports. www.asus.com

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the NAG DOOM 3 survival kit

Ah, yes, DOOM 3's arrival is around the corner... which means that thousands of gamers around the world are going to be spending days and days glued to their computers. But this is an unhealthy thing to do and we at NAG are concerned about our valued readers... if you all die, who's going to buy the magazine, after all?

So, with this altruistic view in mind, we have prepared this little guide for those of you who are going to be as obsessed with this title as we are.

Oh, yes, there is another thing you need to consider - your machine. These are the minimum speculative, err... specs, to be able to run DOOM 3:

1 GHz CPU
256 MB RAM
GeForce 1/ Radeon 7XXX

A system with this equipment should get you around one frame per minute...

A big teddy bear - for when the game gets too scary

A potty - because nature does call

Instant food - what, you're going to cook? If it requires more than a kettle, forget it!

Chips and cool drink - quick snacks, for when you're too busy to boil the kettle

Energy drinks - NAG deadline approved products

Wet wipes - part of the personal hygiene regimen, for the places that really need moisture

A book - for the load times

A comfy chair - you're going to need it. Also, it's a place to hang a jacket, in case you get cold.

A sun lamp - who needs to go outside? Besides, the chances of developing a melanoma with one of these babies is minimal, compared to real sunlight, which... (Insert argument here)

Picture of John and Trent - to watch over you like the gods they are

Lucky mascots - we find making use of a wide pantheon is most effective...

A towel - for wiping up sweat, drool and various other liquids that may be excreted while playing a scary game

A pile of smokes* (optional) - advance your lung cancer exponentially. Besides, we know that stress is cured by nicotine... Be sure to have a very large ash-tray at hand

Champagne - for when you finish... if you finish...

Glass cleaner - keep the monitor clean; small monsters may be hidden by smudges

Air freshener - to take care of odours arising from fear related bodily functions

Insecticide - takes care of crawling and flying insects, as well as irritating siblings

Oral hygiene kit - to keep your breath mint fresh when screaming

Vitamins and protein - biltong and effervescent vitamin tablets, because you need them...

Coffee kit - for coffee... duh! Also handy for making instant foods

Candy - a sugar rush may increase your response time

Toilet paper - use in combination with the potty...

Matches - the best way to take care of drooping eyelids

Emergency medical supplies - Aspirin, eye drops and plasters (for the blisters and calluses that will develop on your fingers)

Airline tickets - remove interruption by girlfriend / wife / parents. And they'll think you're all generous and stuff

Fake doctor's note - school / work is *not* an option!

UPS - because Murphy is *always* listening...



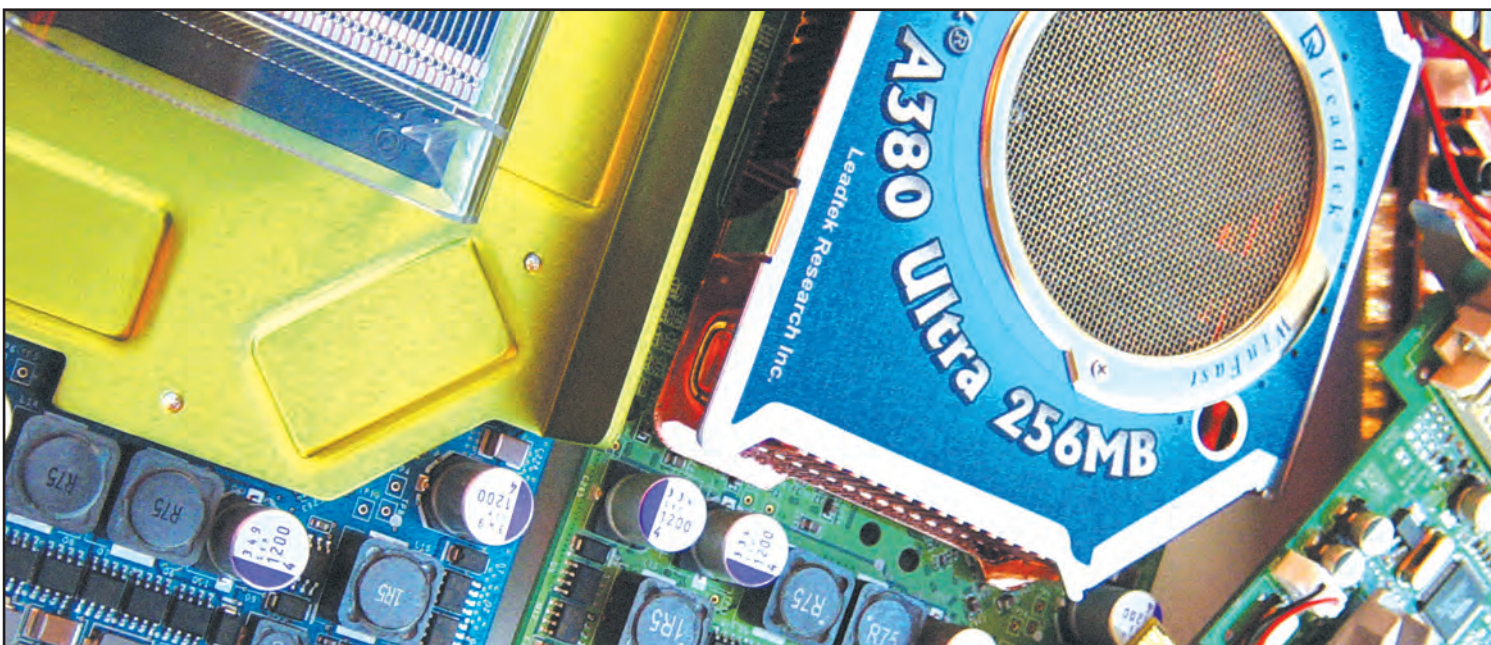
H@RDCOR3

VGA

writer: Tom Taylor

This year has been, and still is, a very exciting year for gamers and hardware enthusiasts alike. The two graphics giants, Ati and Nvidia, have both released their greatest performing GPU to date and by the time this article is published, PCI express and the new Intel 915 and 925 sockets will have been commercially released.

Let me start off by saying that I am gutted. As I am writing this introduction, a lonely Nvidia 6800 graphics card, with my name on it, is somewhere in a warehouse at customs. Yes, I was hoping to get the exclusive review of this superb graphics card done in time for this issue but sadly this will not be possible. I cried myself to sleep the night that I heard I won't have it in time, but such is life. On the bright side though, I did manage to find a couple of Ati Radeon X800 Pro graphics cards. The X800 is Ati's second generation of DirectX 9 graphics cards and features a core clock speed of 475 MHz while its 256-bit GDDR3 memory is running at 900MHz with 28.8 GB/s of bandwidth at its disposal. It is obvious that the X800 based graphics cards in this group test out-performed the rest of the pack but I must admit that I was a little disappointed not to have achieved higher scores on my stock benchmarking system. Thinking that there might be a problem somewhere I scoured the Internet based review sites for confirmation and I would be lying if I said I was not a bit disappointed when I confirmed that these results where indeed on par. Looking at a gamer who is likely to buy a graphics card such as this, it is more than likely that it will be over-clocked. This will most likely result in slightly higher benchmark results as seen here. There is even a rumour that the X800 Pro's 12 pixel pipeline (it actually has 16 but 4 of them are disabled for the Pro version) could be increased to the X800 XT's 16 pixel pipeline by means of a hard mod (modifying the hardware by connecting two contact points with solder or something similar) and to flash the Bios of the X800 Pro with that of an X800 XT, but many people are wary of this and very few actually want to attempt this on their expensive X800 Pro. Another problem is that the extra 4 pipelines might actually be broken so any attempt at unlocking them will prove worthless. Over-clocking aside, the stock X800 Pro is a very powerful graphics card and unless you want to squeeze out every last drop of performance I would suggest rather doing a software over-clock.



SYNAPSYS
COOL PC TECHNOLOGY

cooling provided by Synapsys

Test PC by Light Edge Technology

**2 GHz Intel Pentium 4 | MSI 865PE Neo2 motherboard
Transcend Radeon 9700 | Philips 107E 17" Monitor
Transcend 512 MB DDR500 RAM
Western Digital 80 GB HDD 7200rpm
LG DVD/CD-RW combination drive**

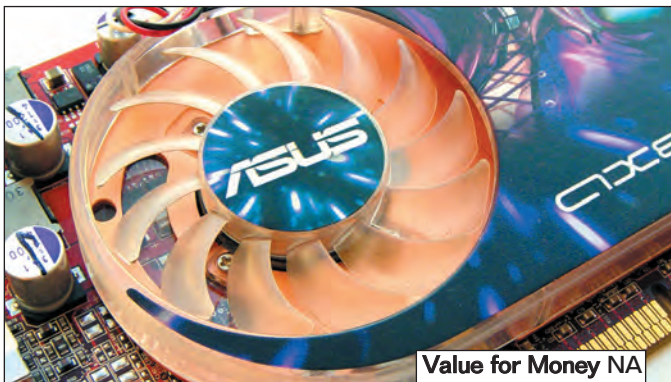


Asus AX800Pro

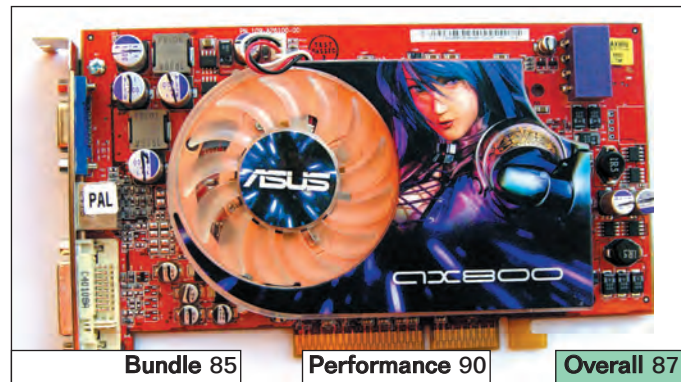
Asus has become one of the key players in the graphic card industry in recent months and the Ati Radeon X800 Pro with 256 MB DDR RAM is a great example of this. As with most of the X800 graphic cards, Ati's reference design is evident with this offering from Asus and is slightly customized with a funky decal covering the heat sink. The card itself also features a DVI port which can be converted into a 15-pin D-Sub port by using the included converter, this will allow you to setup dual monitors; there is also an S-Video output making it easy to connect your PC to a television. Apart from its performance, which I will get to in a moment, one of this product's most notable features is its bundle. The packaging is quite striking and the box is relatively large and is a great teaser for what's inside. Apart



from this awesome graphics card you will find a web camera with built in microphone and video security software which works surprisingly well. Its bundled games are also a lot better than some of the titles bundled with other graphics cards that I have reviewed to date. There is a full version of Counter Strike: Condition Zero and a full version of Deus EX: Invisible War. Looking at gaming performance this card was one of the top performers in some of the benchmarks that were run. Sadly the recommended retail price for this card was not available at the time of going to print but unless it is a lot more expensive than its competitors this would probably be one of the best high-end cards around.



Value for Money NA



Bundle 85

Performance 90

Overall 87

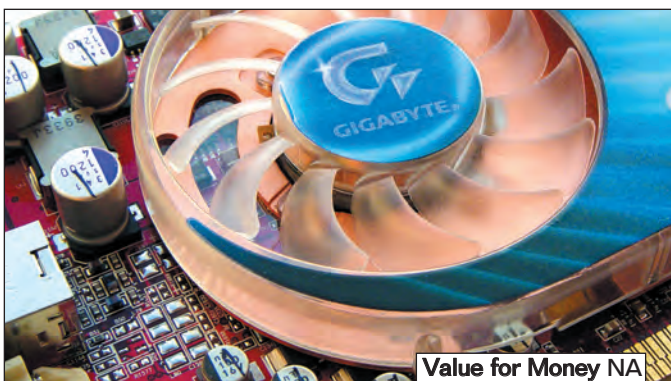
Plus: Great performance | Great bundle **Minus:** Might be expensive **Supplier:** Proton Technology [011] 486-0748
Internet: www.prototech.co.za **RRP:** TBA

Gigabyte GV-R80P256D

Gigabyte is another of the hardware manufacturers that deserve recognition for the great work they have done with their hardware. Their current high-end graphics card is the Ati Radeon X800 pro and it also features the recognizable Ati reference design with a custom decal on the heat sink. As is the case with all X800 Pro based graphics cards, this one features a DVI port which can be converted to a 15-pin D-Sub port for connecting a second monitor to your system. It also has an S-Video connector making hooking your PC up to your television a breeze. Looking at the box I was expecting quite an impressive bundle but was sadly disappointed upon closer inspection. The bundled games are nothing significant and include the two titles, Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield and SpellForce. The software applications which are bundled with the card include the ever popu-

lar Cyberlink PowerDVD 5 and a seemingly unknown title called 3D-Album by a company called Micro Research. There are also some cables included which allow you to connect, via the S-Video port, your PC to your television or other S-Video compatible devices.

Its performance was on par for most of the benchmark tests but it slightly outperformed others in the gaming orientated benchmarks.



Value for Money NA



Bundle 75

Performance 85

Overall 80

Plus: Performance **Minus:** Bundle **Supplier:** Rectron [011] 203 1000
Internet: www.rectron.net **RRP:** R 7000



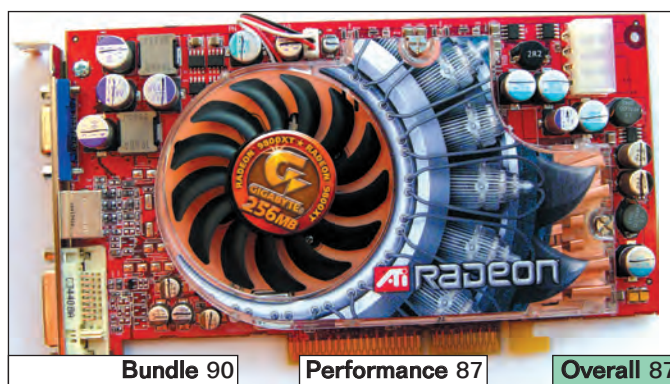
Gigabyte GV-R98X256D

This, the second Gigabyte graphics card in this month's roundup, is the only Ati Radeon 9800XT in this test. As I mentioned before, most of the distributors are waiting for, or have ordered, the new generation of graphics cards so stocks of these have been limited. This offering from Gigabyte features 256 MB of DDR RAM and its bundle was by far the most valuable as it "included" the yet to be released Half-Life 2. By "included" I mean that the box contains a coupon with a hidden activation key, this will entitle you to a free full version of this much anticipated game from Valve. Its other bundled games are not bad either, including: Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness, Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield, and Will Rock, games which are still currently available as separate purchases. On the software application side it is rather light in its offering and only Cyberlink's

PowerDVD 5 is included. Even though this Radeon 9800XT GPU has been superseded by the X800, I was very impressed by Gigabyte's performance results. In both the Far Cry and UT2004 benchmark tests this card performed on par with the more powerful X800 and FX5950. Looking at the other benchmark results, though, the differences between this and the already mentioned high-end cards become evident. All in all this is a great graphics card for the gamer who does not want to sell a kidney but then again, spending only a R1000 more gets you the ultimate in graphics performers today, the Radeon X800. Hopefully the 9800XT range of cards will drop slightly in price making the price difference a little bigger and this one more affordable.



Value for Money 85



Bundle 90

Performance 87

Overall 87

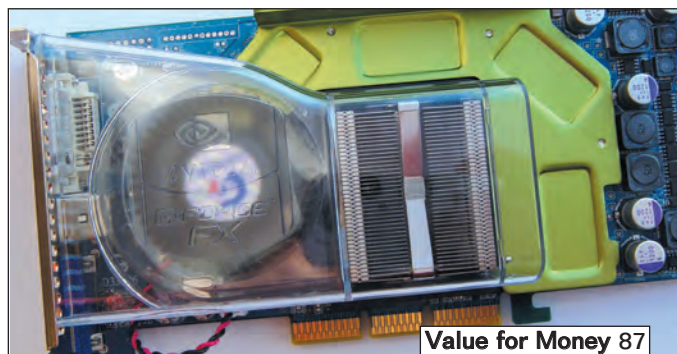
Plus: Performs well | **Bundled HL2** **Minus:** Not an X800 **Supplier:** Rectron [011] 203 1000
Internet: www.rectron.net **RRP:** R 4999



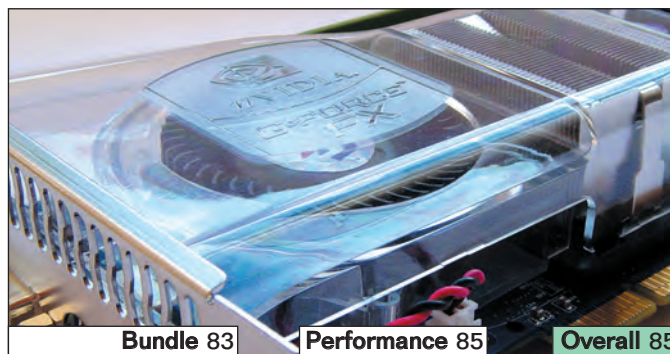
Gigabyte N595U256V

The **Gigabyte N595U256V** brings back memories; it reminds me so much of the GeForce FX5800 Ultra. This offering from Gigabyte features the two PCI bracket design which allows for cool air to be sucked over the aluminium heat sink. Even though this design might not be liked by many people I find it to be quite effective, luckily the fan on this FX5950 Ultra graphics card is not as noisy as the FX5800 Ultra which was dubbed the dust buster. The heat sink covers most of the card on the front and the back, I think it would have looked a lot better though, if the back heat sink which is black, was metallic green as well. This card features 256 MB of DDR RAM and also has the DVI connector onboard with a 15-pin D-Sub converter in the box. Also in the box you will find an S-Video VIVO (Video-In, Video-Out) adapter. This adapter allows you to have both S-Video in- and out-puts as well as AVI in- and out-puts. Looking at the bundled

software I am sad to say that I have been slightly spoiled by the HL2 bundle of the Gigabyte GV-R98X256D. The software shipped with this card, however is pretty decent in its own right - Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield, Arx Fatalis and Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness. On the software application side, the offering is pretty much the same as most of the other Gigabyte graphics cards and includes CyberLink PowerDVD 5 SE, Cyberlink Powerdirector, and a photo-album application called 3D-Album DE. Looking at the various offerings in this price range and considering the close benchmark results it becomes difficult to single out one graphics card.



Value for Money 87



Bundle 83

Performance 85

Overall 85

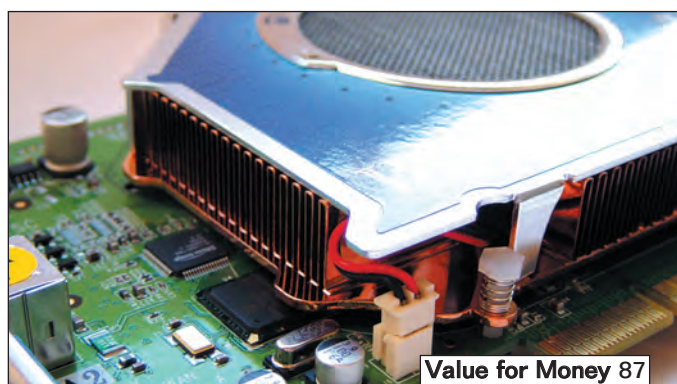
Plus: VIVO **Minus:** Dual PCI bracket is not everyone's cup of tea **Supplier:** Rectron [011] 203-1000
Internet: www.rectron.net **RRP:** R 4999



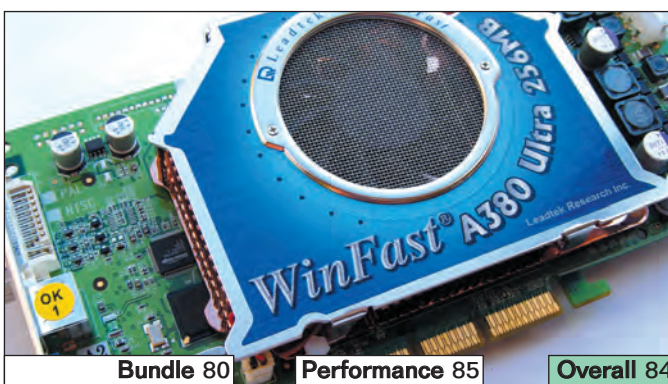
Leadtek WinFast A380 Ultra TDH

The **Leadtek** WinFast A380 Ultra TDH is a monster of a graphics card and is based on the Nvidia FX5950 Ultra GPU. It also features 256 MB DDR RAM and its large copper heat sink with aluminium back plate makes it the heaviest graphics card in this roundup. It also features a DVI output port and in the box you will find a 15-pin D-Sub converter to attach a monitor which does not use a DVI connector. I was happy to see that the bundle includes some decent software applications. This card ships with three Ulead applications, even though these are only the SE versions I have used them quite extensively in the past. The three titles are Cool 3D SE, DVD MovieFactory 2.5 SE, and VideoStudio 7 SE. On the gaming side I was a bit disappointed with the included games, the two titles, GunMetal and Big Mutha Truckers are to my mind mediocre games. On the plus

side though, Leadtek included its own system utility called WinFox which, for one thing, allows you to over-clock your memory and core frequencies. This application works quite well, but I feel more assured making use of a third party over-clocking utility which has been designed solely for the purpose of over-clocking. Looking at its performance, this Nvidia FX5950 based graphics card offers performance which is on par with its competitors. Its recommended retail price also doesn't make it stand out from the rest. So it will come down to its bundled software and your personal preference. Difficult choice indeed, as this is a great graphics card.



Value for Money 87



Bundle 80

Performance 85

Overall 84

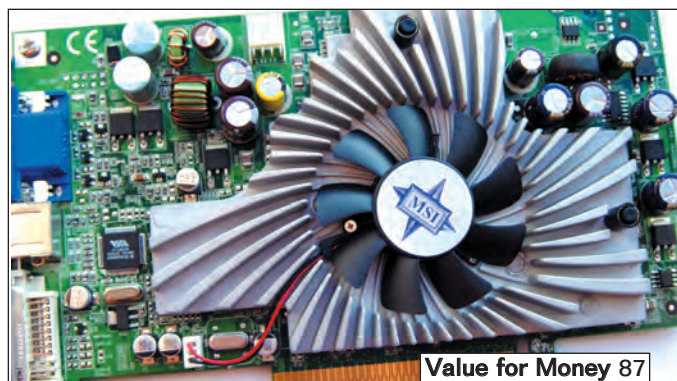
Plus: Great cooling means this card should not have any heat issues **Minus:** 3D Mark 2001 SE results **Supplier:** Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.net **RRP:** R 4999



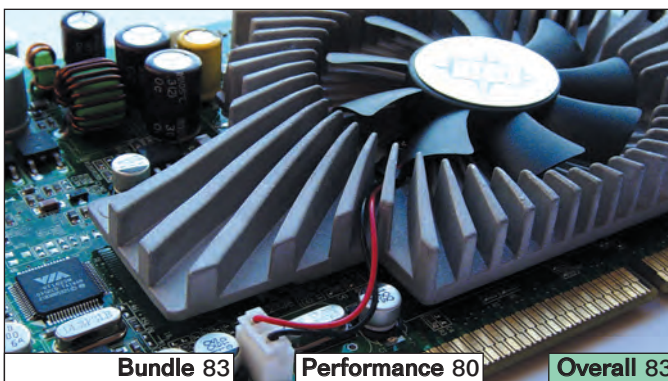
MSI RX9800 Pro Plus TD-128

MSI has in recent years really impressed me with their product line-up. This Radeon 9800 Pro graphics card is the perfect example of a great product made better. Visually this card does not look as impressive as some of the other graphics cards I have looked at to date, in fact I was a little disappointed not to see a flashy heat sink and fan, especially from MSI. Aesthetics aside, there was one other feature which I am still trying to decide whether I like or not, the positioning of the power connector. This connector is placed in an awkward position as the power cable will have to virtually hang in the middle of nowhere to reach it. Looking at the bundled software I was not surprised to see the extensive title list which MSI is famous for but if you have already bought an MSI graphics card recently you will be saddened by the fact that there is nothing new to their appar-

ent standard set of bundled software. The software titles include Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon, The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind, Duke Nukem Manhattan Project, and a collection of other less significant games. The software applications include Adobe PhotoShop Album SE, InterVideo WinDVD 5.1, VirtualDrive (allowing you to run your software without inserting the CD), and RestorIT (a system restore application). The benchmark results were also quite impressive in that this Radeon 9800 Pro was able to keep up the pace amongst the heavyweights in the industry. Even though this card is technically not a high-end graphics card anymore I can still easily recommend it as it offers a great performance versus price ratio.



Value for Money 87



Bundle 83

Performance 80

Overall 83

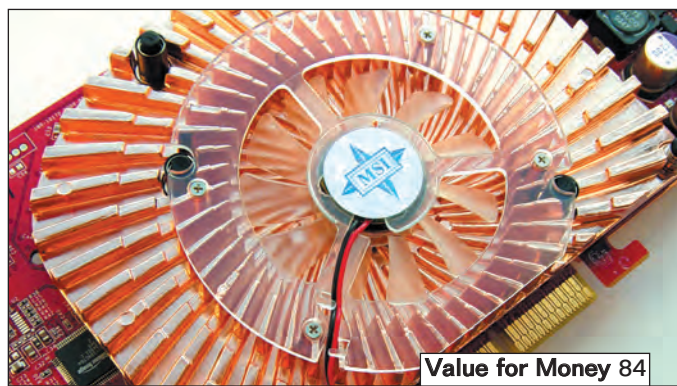
Plus: Great price vs. performance **Minus:** Dated software bundle **Supplier:** Light Edge [021] 510-8270 **Internet:** www.lightedge.co.za **RRP:** R 2500



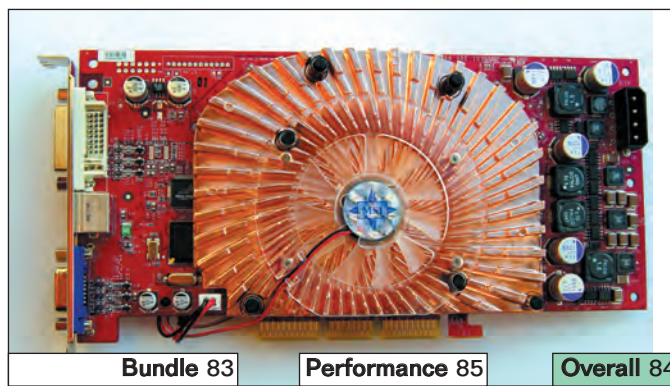
MSI FX5950U-VTD256

If I had to award a prize for best packaging, then this graphics card from MSI would win hands down. Not only is the box big and attractive but it is also stocked with many software titles, albeit the same as the MSI RX9800 Pro Plus TD-128. Also in the box you will find an S-Video VIVO adapter which allows you to have both S-Video in- and out-puts as well as AVI in- and out-puts on your graphics card. The card itself feels fairly heavy - this is mostly due to its large copper heat sink which covers both the back and front of this graphics card as well as all of the RAM chips. I ran into a little problem while installing this card. On the back of it, it has a secondary fan which aids in cooling the GPU from behind, this fan protrudes quite a bit and could (as it did in my case) prevent it from fitting onto the motherboard properly. MSI was clever enough to make this secondary fan easily

removable without damaging the card and in under a minute the problem was resolved. As I said with the previous MSI graphics card, the software set is fairly standard throughout their range and I hope they will update it soon. The bundled games include: Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon, The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind, Duke Nukem Manhattan Project. The software applications include such titles as Adobe PhotoShop Album SE, InterVideo WinDVD 5.1, VirtualDrive, and RestorIT. Looking at the FX5950U-VTD256's performance it is easy to see that its performance is on par with the rest of the field. Taking this into consideration it comes down to price and this one beats the rest.



Value for Money 84



Bundle 83

Performance 85

Overall 84

Plus: Great cooling | Reliable performance **Minus:** Dated software bundle **Supplier:** Light Edge Technology [021] 510-8270
Internet: www.lightedge.co.za **RRP:** R 4500

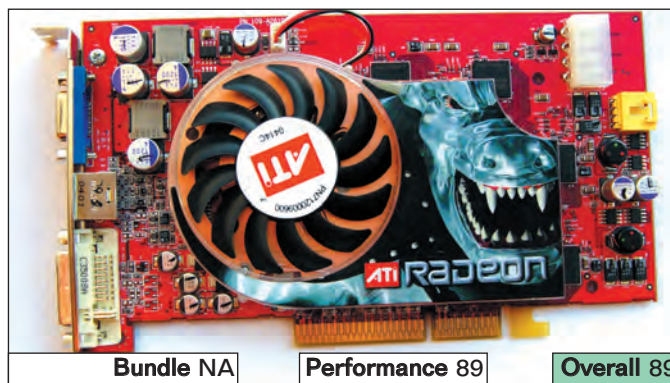
Sapphire Radeon X800Pro

If there is one company that deserves the great reputation it has received over the last couple of years then Sapphire Technologies is that company. Many gamers the world over rave about the performance offered by Sapphire cards and it has even been said to be one of the best graphics card manufacturers for over-clocking. The Sapphire Radeon X800Pro features 256 MB GDDR3 memory and sports the reference Ati design. Because this particular card was one of the first available in South Africa Sapphire supplied us with the reference card and not any of the bundled extra's (you can read the whole story in last months issue). Curious as to what the bundled extras might be I contacted some people and scoured the Internet and if all the rumours are true gamers are in for a real treat. The first batch of boards have all been bundled with Tomb Raider: Angel

of Darkness as Sapphire wanted to hit the streets early. But later revisions will see Sapphire ship Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow and Prince of Persia: Sands of Time with their X800 Pro. The other bundled goodies will include the usual DVI converters, S-Video cables and the software application is going to be Cyberlink PowerDVD 5. If you are an existing Sapphire hardware user you should be familiar with this companies RedLine over-clocking utility, this application is a very easy to use over-clocking application. As with some of the other Radeon X800 graphics cards in this roundup the retail price was not available at the time of going to print, keeping in mind it would probably be close to the R 5500 - R 6000 mark, it will still be out of reach of many gamers but the price will come down eventually.



Value for Money NA



Bundle NA

Performance 89


Overall 89

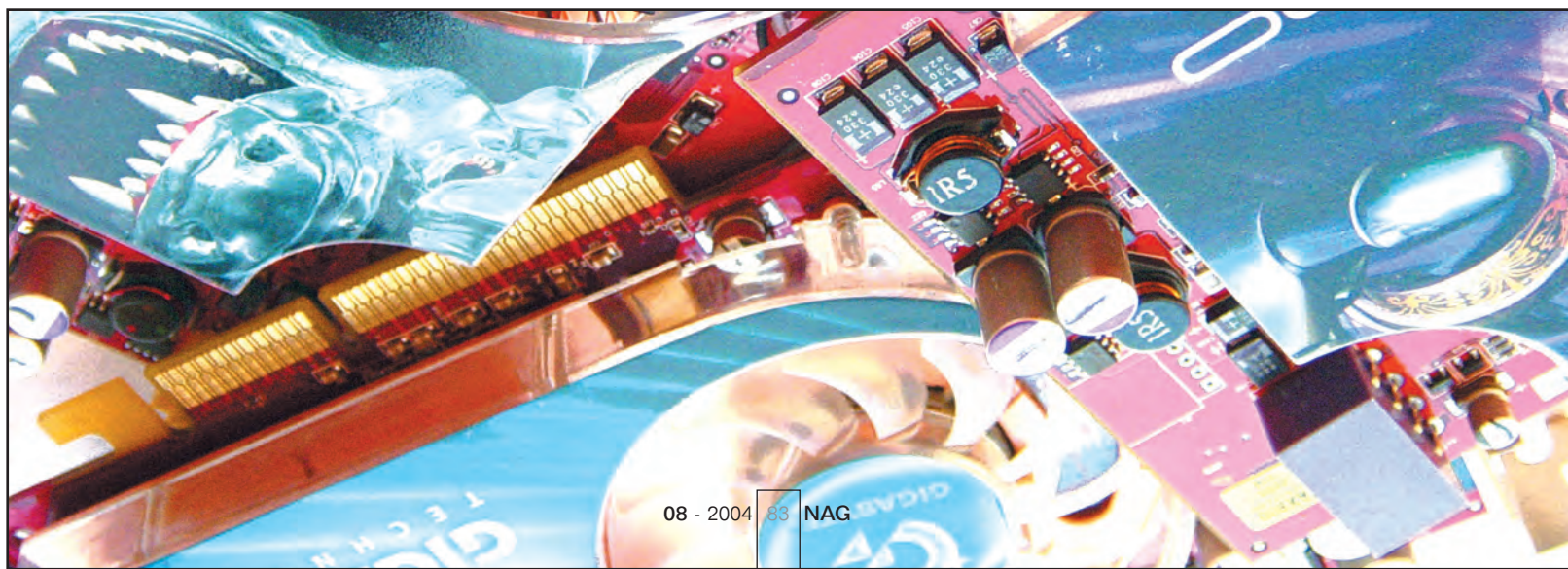
Plus: Performance **Minus:** It'll be quite expensive **Supplier:** Esquire Technology [012] 657 1111
Internet: www.esquire.co.za **RRP:** TBA

Benchmarking

Getting cards for this month's H@rdcor3 roundup was sheer hell. Almost all of the local distributors are waiting patiently for the X800's and FX6800's to arrive and have subsequently not ordered any of the current high end graphics cards - this was the case with at least four of the distributors I usually get my hardware from and sadly caused me to only have eight high-end cards for you to drool over this month. On the positive side of things, I could not have asked for a better time for Bench 'emAll! (www.benchemall.com) to be released. This application, when set up correctly, will run most of your benchmark applications automatically and produce one text document with all of the scores listed, when it is done. You can only use it with the benchmark applications it supports and most of them are on the compatible list. Using this application is very easy and you simply need to have the benchmark applications or game installed and it will detect it automatically. You can then go and setup specific parameters for each game, such as telling it which time-demo to run, and click the run button. About 45 minutes later (depending on the amount of benchmarks you chose to run) you will have a text file with all of the scores you chose to receive. Bench 'emAll! is by far one of the best benchmarking tools I have ever used. It literally shaved a day off my benchmarking time as I only needed to configure it once throughout the whole benchmarking process. It costs about R175 depending on the exchange rate but it is well worth it.

Testing the graphics cards this month I used my usual test bed but added another 512 MB of DDR500 RAM and installed a 3.2 GHz Pentium 4 with 800 MHz FSB. I used Bench 'emAll! for all but one of the benchmarks, Aquamark 3, as there is no compatibility with it yet. I only had one snag when testing the X800 graphics cards, 3DMark03 kept crashing when I tried to execute it, after some lengthy research I found that there is a hot fix for 3DMark03 from Futuremark's webpage (www.futuremark.com/download/hotfix/3dmark03/). The solution simply requires you to download and install a new version of the Entech's "Direcpl.dll

Model name	RightMark Video Analyzer @ 1024x768 (fps)	Far Cry	UT2004 @1024x768 (rated in FPS)				Halo: Combat Evolved	Splinter Cell	3DMark03 (1024x768)	3DMark 2001 SE Pro	Aquamark 3			Score
			botmatch	dm- rankin	as- convoy	br- colossus					GFX	CPU	Total	
 Asus AX800Pro	77.06	49.91	113.66	116.32	62.28	112.38	69.25	68.954	9594	19540	7116	8486	50.142	87
Gigabyte GV-R80P256D	76.53	49.75	114	167.13	62.31	112.56	69.18	68.064	9563	18709	7100	8369	49.869	80
Gigabyte GV-R98X256D	74.61	51.38	114.57	167.94	62.88	112.9	56.18	56.654	6538	17470	6060	8305	44.409	87
Gigabyte N595U256V	63.17	41.82	114.53	166.73	63.05	113.83	51.76	54.717	6442	16126	5949	8404	43.929	85
Leadtek WinFast A380 Ultra TDH	63.92	41.38	114.49	166.97	62.56	113.95	51.9	55.372	6467	16257	5985	8385	44.109	84
MSI RX9800 Pro Plus TD-128	64.8	41.51	114.95	168.72	62.88	113.26	52.83	53.63	6096	17169	5679	8305	42.333	83
MSI FX5950U-VTD256	63.38	41.52	114.3	166.49	62.86	113.56	51.9	55.317	6463	16225	5979	8398	44.103	84
Sapphire Radeon X800Pro	76.19	49.87	113.61	166.29	62.06	112.47	69.14	67.875	9499	18675	7089	8451	49.939	89





Elsa Falcox 980XT

Elsa are better known in the world of 3D rendering for their excellent range of Quadra video cards, Nvidia-based offerings featuring massively accelerated rendering capabilities to this specialist environment. Generally more than double the price of high-range consumer cards, these boards were nevertheless fairly awful at gaming despite advanced rendering features.

On test here, however, is a new consumer-based offering from this manufacturer called the Elsa Falcox 980 XT. In fact the Falcox range extends from the range-topping X800 series down through 9600 XT chipsets and even further into past Ati chipsets. However this product line is not yet well recognised locally.

Based on the R360 GPU from Ati, this board features 256 MB of video RAM and sports a cooling system identical to that found on the newer X800 offerings, making it difficult to tell apart from these latest boards until you plug it in and boot up.

Having recently tested two X800 variants, it is curious to note how quickly higher-powered offerings taint the performance available from models which just yesterday it seems were the top of the line, such as this one. As you'll see from the benchmark figures, this Elsa Falcox delivers excellent 3D performance, but at first the results seemed a little underwhelming when compared against the X800s.

After a straightforward and trouble free installation, the Elsa offering was ready to be put through its paces. But before launching into benchmarks, the all-important subjective testing using the latest spread of games titles.

The R360 chipset is still a remarkably powerful one today even after having been superseded right at the top end. And with a core clock of 412 MHz and effective DDR memory clock of 730 MHz this Elsa variant can still push pixels with full 3D effects at quite a pace. Far Cry runs great with just about all detail maxed out, although this shader-heavy title does suffer at 1600 X 1200 with FSAA enabled. Painkiller is extremely smooth and playable with all effects turned on, and WarCraft 3 will run up against its frame limiter at all but the highest resolutions.

For the majority of the titles currently

being played, in fact, the Falcox proved more than up to the task of showing off their latest graphics engines to the fullest effect without any sweat whatsoever. The only current game, and it is brand new, which shows any real graphics lag is Perimeter. This does only manifest at the 1280X1024 with all effects on and in the midst of major skirmishes though.

Benchmarks reflect that this kind of high-end performance is to be expected from the Falcox 980 XT. With 6345 points achieved in 3DMark 03 with no FSAA the Elsa offering is without a doubt one of the most powerful cards available at the moment. With 6X FSAA enabled however the sheer power of the newer generation chipsets becomes apparent, as the 9800 XT falls off dramatically to 2394 3DMarks. This is quite a performance hit even when compared against some more affordable competitive products, and compared to the X800s score of around 5500 it really illustrates just how much the newer generation has moved things on.

The quality of the image delivered at this level of filtering is truly superb on this offering however. The Falcox produced some of the crispest textures and smoothest polygons I've witnessed, arguably better than its own bigger brother managed.

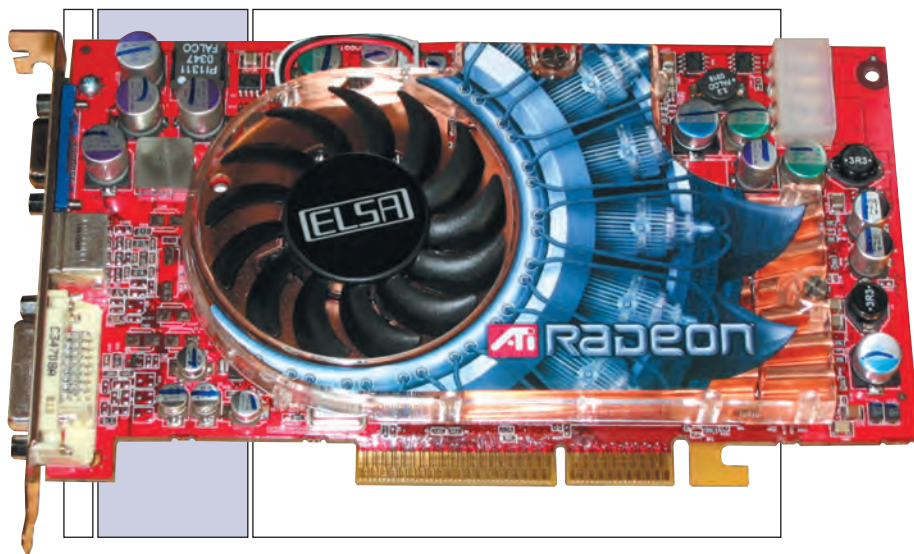
The DirectX9-focussed Aquamark 3 showed this 9800 XT to be slightly below some cards I've tested also

based on this chipset, only managing 40590 points, very similar to the score posted by an R350-based 9800 Pro. Still close enough for it to remain high up in the performance chart though.

The GunMetal benchmark is a more useful indication of real-world FSAA performance than 3DMark, and this test run showed only a 10 - 15% performance hit when running basic 2X FSAA as opposed to the full-blown 6X model. Even with this most demanding filtering method enabled, the Falcox still delivered average frame rates in excess of 25 fps, a result which would yield a very playable game. Worryingly down, once again, on the results achieved by more affordable Nvidia-based boards.

Elsa ship Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness and Raven Shield in the retail box of the Falcox 980 XT, along with all the cables and converters necessary to make use of the cards TV-Out functionality and dual-display capabilities via DVI.

This is a powerful offering, although the poor FSAA performance is somewhat concerning. Considering that the 9800XT is now falling further down the range into the mainstream segment, Ati should be considering a price review to keep it competitive. Nonetheless even at the current price level, the Falcox 980 XT will keep you pleased with your purchase for the next 12 months at the very least.



Planet ADSL Wireless Modem Router

If you have an ADSL connection and want to add wireless functionality to your local network then this is the product for you. The device itself looks very much like a regular ADSL modem from Planet but the two protruding antennas should give away the fact that this device can offer a lot more functionality. The ADW-4100 is an ADSL modem with routing capabilities, and a built in 802.11b access point, it also features a built in four port switch. Once connected to your network you are able to log into this unit's configuration menu via a web browser. Because this is an ADSL modem/router, you are able to configure your connection settings in the configuration menu on the device. The great thing about this is that unlike having a modem connected to your computer, this will allow any computer on the network to have access to the Internet even if your computer is switched off. For small offices, or even a household where a couple of family members share an ADSL connection, this

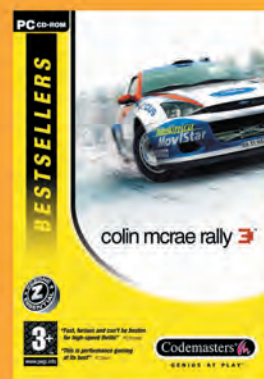
method should be the ideal solution. The router part of the device allows you to enable NAT (Network Address Translation) capabilities which basically allows you to hide your internal network IP addresses from the outside world and if you want to access one of your computers from the Internet you can simply configure the Virtual Server setting on this device which will allow you to access any computer on your network even though NAT is enabled. On the wireless side, this device sports all the features of a regular access point such as a DHCP server and the usual security features such as allowing you to disable the SSID and enabling WEP encryption. This is an awesome device for the user who wants an all-in-one ADSL solution and having this device taking care of your ADSL connection settings makes life a little easier as you can literally just hook up a PC to your network and it will be connected to the Internet.



Plus: The only ADSL modem you will ever need **Minus:** Not 802.11g wireless access point
Reviewer: Tom Taylor **Supplier:** Scoop Distribution [021] 555 4740 **Internet:** www.planet.com.tw **RRP:** TBA



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PixelView GeForce FX5900 XT Golden Limited Edition

When the GeForce FX 5900 XT range was first introduced I was sceptical to say the least. Whether the cards would offer the full performance available from the older chipset used in the 5800 series, but at a mid-range price point, seemed unlikely to me. After all look at the MX series that preceded it.... The GeForce 4 MX offering didn't even come close to previous-generation GeForce 3 cards.

The PixelView FX5900XT Golden Edition has arrived to dispel my concerns, however. This board features the PDFil (Plasma Display Fan) system seen on other PixelView offerings, which is a combination proprietary cooler and display unit providing a constant read-out of your GPU temperature for the benefit of over-clocking, and also just to make your case look that much cooler.

What is particularly nice about the PDF implementation on this offering is that it can easily be swivelled to different viewing angles, or even removed completely and mounted in a CD-ROM bay with the provided bracket. There's also new software, dubbed Patrolman,

which provides easy over-clocking functionality and on-screen hardware monitoring.

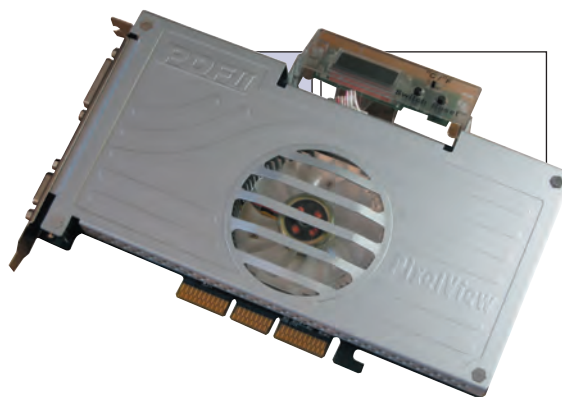
Funky features like these aside, the card performs remarkably well. The GPU is now three generations old, but delivers gaming performance very close to boards pitched higher up in the range. In 3DMark 03, running at 1024 X 768 resolution with no FSAA, this card manages a healthy 5215 overall. Even more impressive is the 3592 it achieves with 4X FSAA enabled at the same resolution.

It's only at higher resolutions that the GPU shows its age, and even then it doesn't exactly fall apart. One resolution step up, at 1280 X 1024, the PixelView FX5900XT still delivers 2423 3DMarks with 4X FSAA turned on.

Aquamark 3 gets a score of 36578 on this card, again a healthy result, while the

GunMetal benchmark shows that the performance difference between 2X FSAA and 4X FSAA is negligible. This offering achieves an average frame rate of 30.95 and 29.51 respectively when just changing the FSAA modes, both really quite impressive numbers in this bench.

So then, I must confess that at least in the case of this PixelView offering, the 5900XT is a really good buy. Beating out all competitor products in the mid-range sector of the market by some margin, this card really does offer high-end performance at a mid level price.



Plus: Great performance for the price **Minus:** Cooler housing too big and flimsy
Reviewer: Russell Bennett **Supplier:** Esquire Technology [012] 657 1111 **Internet:** www.esquire.co.za **RRP:** R1800.00

Thermaltake Polo 12 kit

Thermaltake have to be given their dues quite often. Even though they have made some impressive blunders or boring innovations, like their sub standard peripheral line, I'm yet to really fault them when it comes to cooling and cases - in fact, most of their products usually only compare badly to their other products!

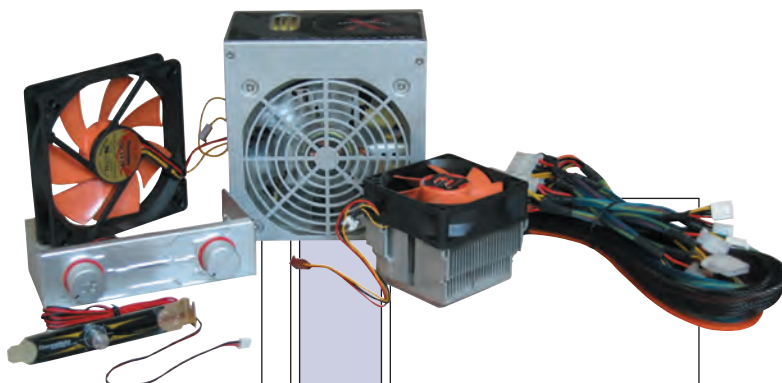
The unimaginatively named Polo 12 kit is another example that the company has at least a few fingers on the PC gamer's pulse. The kit sports a 410 W PSU (complete with sleeved cables and glowing interior fan) a 120 mm case fan, a copper-based CPU Heat sink and cooler and both front and back fan control units.

The most impressive of the lot is the power supply. Apart from being sleeved and glowing quite nicely, it's more than enough power for most gamers' needs and it has ample amounts of cables, including two Serial ATA plugs. Placing the fan on the bottom also makes the unit look more appealing from outside.

Sadly the same design flair didn't go into the other fans, since they are stock standard Thermaltake models that do their job - they cool stuff, with no glowing effects. The CPU cooler fits on a P4, K7 and K8 and spins between 1300 and 2800 RPM. It's a fair unit, but not for people out to over-clock

their chips. The case fan, at 120 mm, is obviously quite big, a problem if your case doesn't support it.

But if you want a neat, solid power supply and a good CPU cooler with fan controls, this is a good buy. I consider the case fan a bonus but negligible addition, due to its size, but that's because I can't use it. But with this kit, you're not likely to need a power or cooling-based upgrade for a while, unless you insist on over-clocking your 3 GHz...



Plus: Value for money | Sexy PSU **Minus:** Bland fans | Unexceptional CPU cooler
Reviewer: James Francis **Supplier:** Thermaltake **Internet:** www.thermaltake.com **RRP:** \$60.00

Rogev MagicCard

Every computer user knows the Windows OS degradation and reinstall process at this point. If your system is connected to the Internet and used regularly the inevitable will and does happen periodically. Those of you in the technical aspect of the industry will have performed a Windows reinstall an incomprehensible number of times. What if you could avoid this hassle completely through a single R500 hardware investment? More importantly, what if you could reduce the time spent on administering a 100 user network for an even lower per-unit cost?

That's precisely where the Rogev MagicCard version 7.0 Plus here makes its grand entrance. And it works too.

This tiny PCI card, once plugged into your machine, takes a miniscule segment of your first IDE drive and hides it from you. The hardware then uses this space to store a snapshot of your stable boot system, and can then be set to restore this virgin data every time you reset your system, or on a weekly schedule perhaps?

Using the MagicCard is really not a job for end-users however despite the PR claims of an easy installation. Even hardened technicians would be well advised to read the installation instructions first, and follow the steps to prepare for the installation before even plugging the device in. Probably of key importance here, in fact, is the suggestion that you move your constantly changing user data to a drive or partition other than C: leaving only your program files on this boot partition.

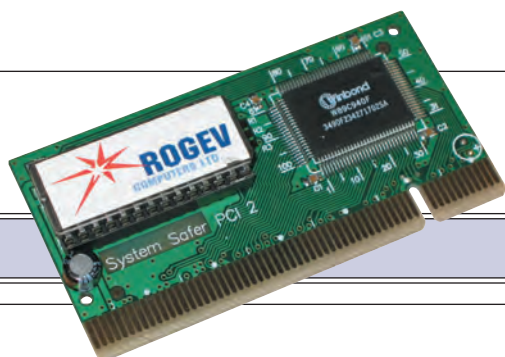
By default the card boots in pro-

tected mode. This is the mode of operation which restores your system to its original state with every single reboot. If you want to add software to your environment then, you need to reboot and switch the product into open mode before any changes you make will be saved.

It's a really good idea, especially for deploying office machines with the required applications already installed. It quite literally makes the system immune from any software problems, from corrupted files to virus infections. Simply reboot and the problem disappears. It's like Ghost in automatic mode and on major performance enhancing substances. You can choose to backup CMOS settings as well and select additional partitions to protect through the boot menu interface.

Of course for home users, and particularly enthusiasts who are regularly changing their OS environment with patches and new software and the like, the MagicCard is more of a hindrance than a boon. It's a particularly focussed piece of hardware, and if saving money on your overall IT budget by standardising on software and making sure it remains unchanged and problem free with no maintenance whatsoever, you'd love the MagicCard as it does this job extremely well for a low acquisition cost.

It is interesting running an unbreakable system for a few days though. You can pull your Windows code into all sorts of interesting shapes you wouldn't dream of trying without the safety of knowing a reboot will repair any damage you've wreaked...

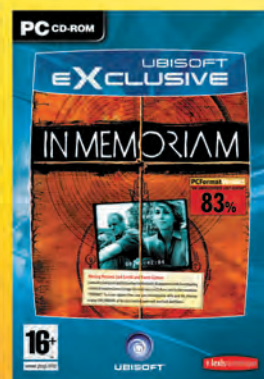


Plus: A truly unbreakable OS in hardware form **Minus:** Useless unless you administer a company LAN
Reviewer: Russell Bennett **Supplier:** Edge PC Systems [011] 793 2924 **Internet:** www.edgepc.co.za **RRP:** R600.00



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KuroKawa SPT868 2.1 Channel speaker set

When it comes to speakers, there's nothing like a good subwoofer to bring out the full gaming experience. With a decent bass box producing some strong vibes you get to feel each gunshot send sonic ripples through your body, each explosion cause a mild tremor in your computer desk, and every nuance of revs as you push harder through a corner.

These KuroKawa SPT868 speakers can deliver this for you. This set is a 2.1 channel speaker system featuring two square satellite speakers (each measuring 90 X 90 mm) and one subwoofer all claimed to deliver 1500 PMPO W of audio power.

Switching the bass box on results in a suitably meaningful whumph of feedback coming rattling through the speakers, and the audio experience they deliver is impressive enough to warrant this. The directional audio provided through the satellites is clear and crisp while the bass pumped out by the woofer sets the area around you shimmering with sonic energy.

Not that this smallish set is ridiculously loud. At maximum volume your

neighbours are likely to complain anywhere after 10 PM, but there are certainly louder speakers available. What I enjoyed with the KuroKawa setup was its audio clarity and integrity. Again, not quite out of the top drawer of audio hardware pegging the SPT868 package squarely in the mid-range of audio accessories, but there's enough quality there to pick up on and enjoy if you're listening.

The design of the woofer itself is suitably modern, complete with a blue light when powered up to "ignite music enthusiasm" according to the packaging. The scythe-like speaker covers which the satellites sport is less appealing but this is purely my subjective opinion.

What didn't impress was the quality of finish. One of the satellite units I received used different colour screws holding the aforementioned speaker covers in place, while the other simply did without one screw entirely.

Also of concern is the fact that the box appears to suggest an upgrade path when

using the KuroKawa products. A "Buy 2.1 channel setup now and upgrade progressively all the way to 5.1" idea, but this really isn't the case as this woofer unit can not support any more satellite speakers being plugged into it.

Overall the KuroKawa speakers presented an enjoyable audio experience and could be a decent set to consider for those on a slightly more limited budget. Sufficient power, good audio quality and plenty of ground-trembling bass.



Plus: Another blue-glowing box! **Minus:** Not exactly a range-topping audio system **Reviewer:** Russell Bennett
Supplier: Corex [011] 707 5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R600

Gigabyte 802.11b USB Stick

What do you get when you combine a 128 MB USB flash disk with an 802.11b USB wireless network adapter? The answer: a very functional device which allows you to, not only store data, but also connect wirelessly to 802.11b networks. I have seen a couple of these nifty little devices before but Gigabyte's offering has a slight advantage above the rest. The USB socket that connects to the actual "stick" can swivel 180 degrees up and down and can twist 90 degrees to either side. The benefit to this is twofold, firstly you can adjust the angle to get optimal reception and secondly, because this device is rather long, you might need to manoeuvre it so that it can fit in a relatively tight space. The rest of the device looks pretty standard as a USB flash disk, apart from the switch on the one side which allows you to toggle between the flash disk mode and wireless adapter mode. There are also a set of red and green status LED's which will indicate when this device is in use, handy to prevent you from pulling it out while it is still operational.

The software that ships with this product allows for you to scan the local air waves for

access points, you can create various profiles based on different environments (such as a home wireless network and an office wireless network). The very handy feature, especially for notebook users, is the ability for the software to enable a power saving mode which will cause the wireless network device to scale down when it is not very busy to preserve battery power. I was also impressed to see that Gigabyte included an AP (Access Point) application with this device. This software allows you to use this wireless LAN USB device as an access point in a wireless networking environment.



Plus: Wireless LAN on the go | Can carry your files with you **Minus:** Only 802.11g specification
Reviewer: Tom Taylor **Supplier:** Rectron [011] 203 1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.net **RRP:** R899

Vantec USB Go2.0

Well, I loved the USB card reader included in the 9800 XT Limited Edition bundle, and enjoyed the USB2.0 hub which featured input ports for plugging in your keyboard and mouse. This month, then, I took a look at the Vantec Go2.0, a combination external USB card reader and USB 2.0 hub in one sleek and shiny device.

This offering uses one USB port on your system to provide an additional three, as well as the capacity to access and use the data off of eight different memory card formats. Supporting Compact Flash (CF) I and II, MMC, SD, MS and MS Pro, MD and SM cards, the Vantec Go2.0 has all the bases covered in this aspect.

Under XP, it is a completely driver-less install. Simply plug the device in to a free USB port and the OS will detect and install it for you, adding the card-reader bays in to "My Computer" as removable disks. Provided you feed it power of course using the supplied power converter.

And this is where the only real rub comes in. The multi card reader from Asus is so very useful because it's truly portable. A similar size to

this unit but without the AC adaptor required. Of course, by incorporating a USB hub as well this Vantec device does require an external power source, but it really detracts from one of the best features of having a mobile memory card reader.

What's more, the USB 2.0 hub I most recently looked at included the ability to plug keyboard and mouse inputs into it, really useful for anyone who moves their desktop around quite a lot. This Go2.0 is shorn of any such value-adds due to its compact design. In other words, it does the two jobs but does each only half as well as competitive, dedicated devices.

So it's nicely designed, works well, and is compatible with PC and Mac systems. It's just that only if you need flash card read and write capability, and have but one USB port left on your system which you perhaps wouldn't mind extending slightly, does this Vantec Go2.0 really become an attractive option. Otherwise I'd recommend getting separate devices, since a card reader with portability built in is more useful and separate USB hubs have their own little niceties you might quite like.



Plus: Versatile **Minus:** Portability **Reviewer:** Russell Bennett
Supplier: Frontosa IT [011] 468 4724 **Internet:** www.frontosa.co.za/it **RRP:** R369.00



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Iomega External USB 2.0 CD-RW/DVD-ROM

Iomega has always produced top class products and I am always eager to see their latest offering. This company has produced many external optical drives but this has to be the most functional yet. As an external optical device it performs as a 52X CD/RW should, it offers a wide range of support for most media and it looks stunning at that. What makes this external optical drive different though, is its integrated 7-in-1 card reader. This means you can plug, directly into it, Compact Flash (type I and type II), Micro Drive, Memory stick (all formats including Memory Stick Pro and Magic Gate), Multimedia (MMC), Smart Media (SM), Secure Digital (SD), and Memory Gate cards. Since I installed this device I have not once had to connect the USB cable to my computer which is great; another benefit is that it subsequently saves your battery power as your digital camera will not be operational during the uploading of the images. You can even go as far as dragging your images (or data) directly

from the memory card onto your blank CD. Unlike other external optical drives this one needs two USB cables to be connected to your computer, this could be seen as a negative point, but keep in mind that the external card reader makes use of its own USB bus. As usual Iomega bundle their proprietary HotBurn Pro software as well as Automatic Backup, a handy backup utility, with this drive. Unsurprisingly it is also Mac compatible and the relevant software for that platform is also included. In the time that I used it I



grew quite attached to this nifty piece of hardware, apart from the CD-writing capabilities which were great, the 7-in-1 card reader, I feel, is a must have, especially if you use a digital camera and PDA (with a memory card) like I do.

Plus: Great all-in-one device **Minus:** Card reader does not accommodate the new xD memory card
Reviewer: Tom Taylor **Supplier:** Storgate Africa [011] 695 1600 **Internet:** www.iomega.co.za **RRP:** R1315

Plexuscom MP100

The MP100 is one of hundreds of devices trying to crack the MP3 player market. This unit is about the size of two match boxes put together, powered by one AAA battery (supplied) with a blue LCD. What makes this MP3 player unique is that it is, for the most part, controlled by a small joystick. There are also four buttons situated on the top end of this device which controls the play/pause functionality as well as the record and AB playback mode. The other functions such as the volume control and track skip are handled by the joystick which is quite an innovative approach to things. On the downside I often found myself trying to increase the volume when, by accident my angle at which I pushed the joystick was slightly off, and it would skip the track. This functional MP3 player is also an FM radio and voice recorder, and it is able to play WMA as well as ADPCM files. The Blue LCD displays quite a lot of information and it made this unit a pleasure to work with.

The MP100 connects to your computer via a USB cable and expanding the memory is simply done by inserting an SD or MultiMedia card into the slot provided. The headphones provided fit around your neck and the sound quality, although not the best I have come across, is great nonetheless. On some tunes I found the lack of bass disappointing but using the FM radio the sound was crisp. The battery life was one of its most significant features and through daily use, listening to the radio as well as MP3 files and doing some voice recording, it lasted close to 9 ½ hours.



Plus: Battery life **Minus:** Joystick not always accurate **Reviewer:** Tom Taylor
Supplier: PLEXUSCOM **Internet:** www.plexuscom.com **RRP:** TBA

Thermaltake Xpeaker

Thermaltake's "car console" theme has yet another plaything added, this time in the form of front mounted speakers. These speakers take up yet another 5 1/4 inch bay in your case (for a grand total of three, if you have the whole range.)

The device is fed a sound signal via a cable that loops from your sound card to a smaller card supplied with the unit. It's quite messy. To internalise the process, you can cut it down to delivering CD sound only (linking directly to your CD ROM.)

While they may be fairly pretty to look at, this device once again oversteps the hardware gimmick line by a few paces. The idea may be good, but the sound quality delivered by this device is so abysmal that even deaf people would be offended. There is virtually no bass response (even with bass boost on) and the fact that the two speakers are so close together (and situated to one side of the user) means that stereo performance is virtually nil.

Personally, I am surprised that Thermaltake, a company with

such high standards normally, would even contemplate releasing the Xpeaker set. It is pointless as a piece of hardware, because its performance is nowhere near what it should be.



Plus: The power button works **Minus:** Sound quality **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Supplier: Thermaltake **Internet:** www.thermaltake.com **RRP:** TBA

Thermaltake Silent Tower CPU cooler

Make no mistake, this thing is huge. The Thermaltake Silent Tower is a gargantuan thing to mount on your CPU, large enough to cause me some concern after our illustrious Editor happened to mention that he'd seen there was a weight limit for CPU coolers above which motherboards are likely to be terminally damaged by the forces of gravity.

Mounting the Silent Tower is worrying enough as it is, since you need to remove the retention base which your motherboard ships with to attach the H-shaped metal base plate beneath the board itself, on to which the cooler itself is placed. The last Thermaltake product I tested in fact used a similar means of attachment, and was the death of a cherished piece of hardware.

Once (carefully) secured in place, however, this solution quickly proved its benefits. The oversized fan which blows cool air onto the enormous arrangement of cooling fins does indeed operate at a very low noise level as the name would suggest. It's so quiet in fact that I found myself wondering more than once if the fan had failed and my CPU about to overheat.

However not once did the Silent Tower fail in its cooling duties. In fact it continued to keep the chip at a decent operating temperature even under

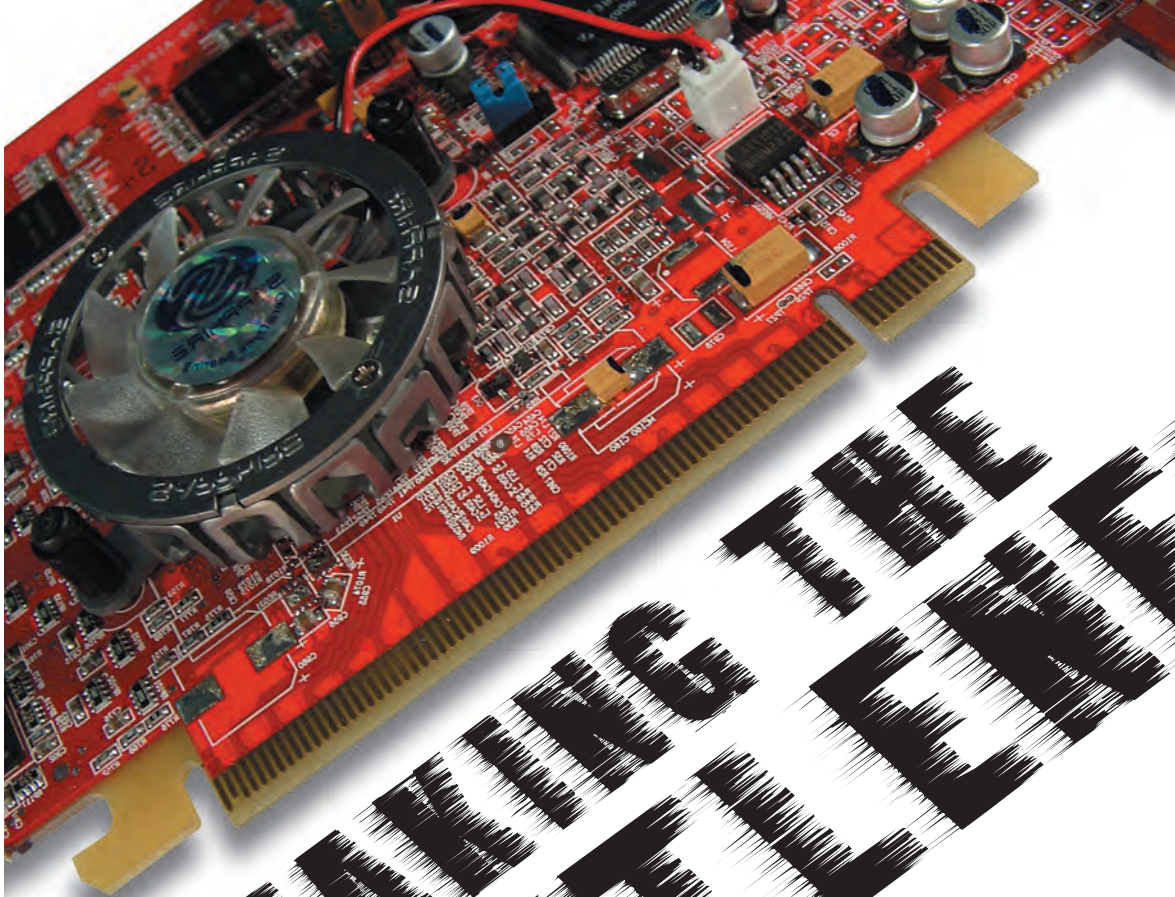
severe load. To get a benchmark, I ran 3DMark 03 in a repeating loop with the standard P4 cooler before installing the Thermaltake product, and after just one hour my 3.06 GHz chip was up to an alarming 72 degrees C, 2 degrees over the danger mark.

With this cooling solution fitted, the exact same test ran for three hours, and the CPU temperature never once breached 60 degrees. This excellent performance is made possible by the heat pipes which conduct heat away from the copper base of the Silent Tower in contact with the CPU, up into the large square "radiator" assembly onto which that big, quiet fan blows.

This Thermaltake product then scores highly for its excellent cooling ability, and by living up to its name and turning your hardcore gaming desktop into a paradigm of silence. You don't really notice just how much noise your CPU fan generates until you've been running a cooling solution this quiet for a week. Upon refitting my standard cooler, the racket emanating from my box seemed positively excessive!



Plus: Very effective cooling | Remarkably quiet **Minus:** Weight **Reviewer:** Russell Bennett
Supplier: Corex [011] 707 5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R490



BREAKING THE FENCE

If you haven't heard of PCI Express yet, don't worry. While a lot of hardware enthusiasts are definitely already familiar with the new technology set to replace the aging PCI Bus, it's been a slow and silent revolution, cautiously changing the market. But it marks the dawn of a new era in computer hardware.

So what is it, why is it so fast and how will it benefit us? These are obvious questions, but thanks to hype and general ignorance to the finer details, PCI Express has arrived in a guise of confusion, with some hailing it as the holy grail of computer hardware set to change the PC world overnight. That's not likely to happen at all, but it will be the biggest thing to happen to computers in the past decade. And we're including John Romero's post-DOOM ego in that equation.

Breaking the bottleneck

PCI Express is, for all practical reasons, a late bloomer. Despite the technology lacking practical applications at the moment, it is part of a much bigger move to evolve PC architecture to the next level. For the past ten or so years, PC hardware has relied on PCI architecture – a bus built with a bandwidth capacity of 133/MBs at 33 MHz that powers the black card slots on today's motherboards, designed to replace the archaic ISA standard (bandwidth indicates the amount of space available for bytes to travel; if you push more than 133 MB's worth of bytes through the bus, it hits a bottleneck and causes the system to wait for everything to arrive). In short it's slow, but to illustrate the point, consider that top-tier Double Data Rate (DDR) memory has bandwidth of 2.1 GB/s – there are a thousand megabytes (MB) in one Gigabyte, so that's nearly twenty times the bandwidth capacity. AGP x8 has the same throughput and hardware such as gigabyte network cards obviously also cater for equal-to or above-the 1-gig-of-data mark. In short, the PCI bus isn't capable of handling this. Even today's higher speed IDE hard-drives, though they tend to have slower transfer speeds than 133 MB/s, can saturate the bus with short data bursts. Now imagine if several devices try and use the bus, which is shared over all the PCI slots, at once.

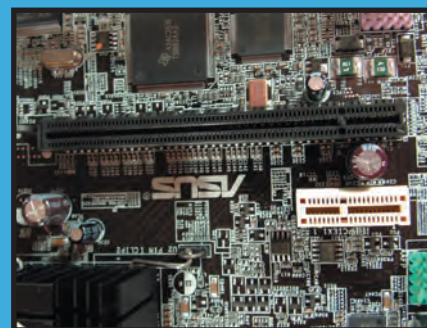
In short, everything's gotten faster except the PCI Bus itself. Time for a change. But what took so long? Well, PCI isn't a bad technology; on the contrary it's been key to hardware growth. It's a solid and flexible hardware standard that has been around for a while and a lot of manufacturers never needed much more. The only areas where you demanded more

than the now-paltry 133 MB/s capacity was with graphic cards and non-workstation hardware, such as high-speed hard drive controllers. The former was solved with AGP and the latter with standards like PCI-X and 66 MHz PCI. But these are expensive, often demanding separate controllers and they obviously wouldn't serve the home or end-user market well. What's the point of having a board that can handle a Gigabyte network card when you pay through your teeth? And the trick to making a technology popular is to have it at an affordable level – both for end users and manufacturers.

These factors have all kept progress in faster I/O (input/output) technologies at bay, right until Intel along with a large group of companies, including Compaq and Dell, spearheaded bringing PCI Express to the market. An open technology, it's free for anyone to use and integrate into their hardware, just like PCI, giving developers and manufacturers a nice, open field to work on. Nothing stifles a technology's growth like corporate politics or closed specifications.

Setting the pace

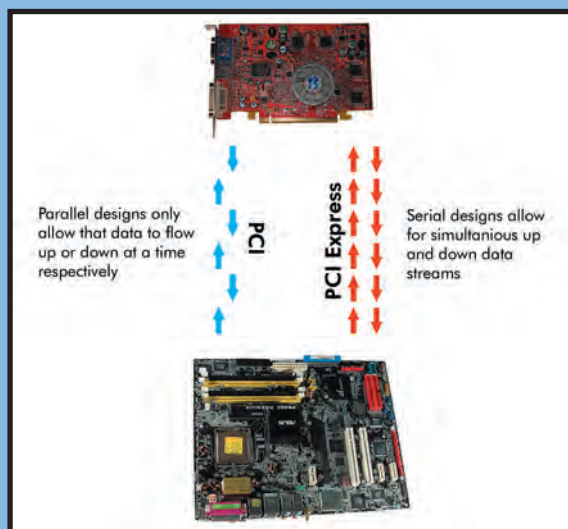
But how does it work? Did hardware people just find a way to accelerate the current PCI bus? Thankfully no. PCI has started to show its age not only because of its speed but its lack of flexibility. While the technology was great when it came out, hardware demands have changed. There are now far more devices on the market than ever before and they all have different needs. For instance, video-editing cards desire far more bandwidth than an entry-level network card (to the point that a lot of them support AGP), so it makes little sense to waste bandwidth on a card that won't



PCI Express, thanks to its scalable architecture, will appear in a variety of sizes. The most common, for now, will be the smaller x1, since it already has a lot more bandwidth than the traditional PCI slot, and the largest for the moment, x16, which will replace AGP as a slot for graphics cards.

need it. PCI Express is far more scalable than PCI, but to understand this we first have to look at how it works.

In traditional Parallel bus architecture data travels either up or down. This means that before data can be sent to, say, the CPU it first needs to wait for the data sent from the CPU to finish its burst first. It's a simplified illustration, but keep that diagram in mind. Obviously this causes delays, wasting valuable milliseconds as data waits in line – and in a busy period this could cause a large delay as more data joins the queue. PCI Express solves this by introducing two permanent lanes – each dedicated to either up or down traffic, a classic hallmark of Serial architecture. Each lane is capable of handling 250MB/s – already faster than the entirety of the PCI Bus. This bandwidth isn't shared either, so as long as a single device doesn't force more than 250/mb down a single lane, you won't get a



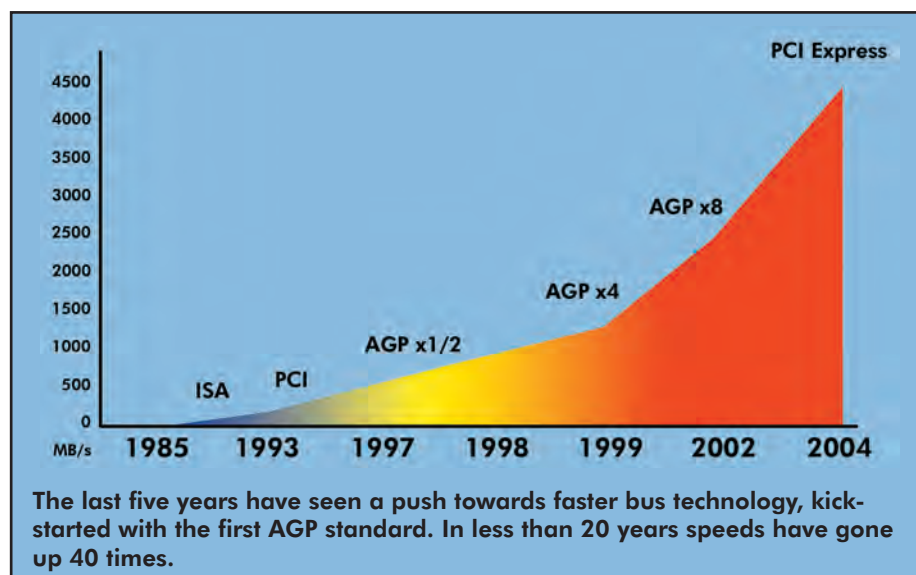
How PCI Express works

Computers utilize packets (small chunks of data) to move information around. When a piece of hardware sends or receives data, it does so in packets. Packets need to travel along routes, called lanes. All hardware sends and receives data; bottlenecks occur when there are more packets being sent through a lane than what the lane can handle. This means the packets need to queue up before they can start towards their destination. Parallel architecture, on which the aged PCI slot is modelled, pushes packets through the same lanes, regardless of whether they are coming or going. This is fine with limited traffic (the term for travelling packets), but if you have a lot of incoming and outgoing data, bottlenecks occur, since you cannot send data in both directions at the same time (hence it being called Parallel architecture). PCI Express solves this problem because it uses Serial Architecture. This allows for lanes to be dedicated for incoming or outgoing traffic, so no bottlenecks would occur unless there is more traffic going one way than the lane is capable of carrying. It also lessens latency (the time data takes to arrive and leave its destination).

bottleneck and the total up/down speed is 500MB/s. No more delays are caused because up and down traffic need to negotiate the same pipeline. It doesn't stop there, though. As mentioned, not all hardware has the same demands, so it makes no sense wasting lanes on hardware that doesn't use it. This means scalability; PCI Express covers this in spades. The smallest slot in the standard is X1, which means you have two lanes or 500MB/s in total. Start moving up to x2, x4 (etc.) and you can see how the bandwidth also scales up. An x16 slot boasts 4GB of bandwidth – twice that of x8 AGP but at the same slot size and lower power demands. This highlights another less known but vital advantage – apart from eating less power, lanes can be shut down when not used, thus they don't drain power when they don't need to – great news for mobile devices like notebooks. PCI Express also allows you to put a smaller card in a bigger slot – you can place an x1 card in an x16 slot and it will run happily. And for graphic cards enthusiasts there is the return of SLI, a technology last seen with Voodoo cards where you can run two graphic cards alongside each other (see the SLI explanation box).

Creating the demand

So all of this really sounds great and we're off for a screaming ride of burning banshee performance in high speed PC computing, right? Well, in theory. This all will obviously become practical over the years, but despite its better-late-than-never arrival, PCI Express is still a bit ahead of its time, at least as far as the demands of the market. Ironical, isn't it? Demand is created by need, but over



the years the need has been solved by building around the problem. When PCI proved too slow to carry new graphic cards, AGP was brought in to solve the problem. Hardware developers have been doing this for a long time, shifting bandwidth demands to other areas such as introducing faster or more memory. The smaller iterations of PCI Express have a lot more use than the larger slots, because no-one, as yet, needs THAT much bandwidth.

To illustrate, look at the transition between x4 and x8 AGP. It's a doubling of speed, but benchmarks have shown that there is nearly no difference between the two. This is because game developers cannot make a game support x8 and risk ignoring x4 – the game would stutter on the lower version. PCI-Express has the same problem – if you write software that takes advantage of the higher speeds, it will suffer on machines that don't have that capacity, i.e. a game that is designed to use x16's 4 GB transfer will hit a

problem when it tries to use AGP x8 or lower. Games operate using the x4 AGP specification. Obviously games will eventually take advantage of this speed, but before that the market will actually need to demand it, since we're not even using AGP to its full capacity yet, this might take a while.

Finding a game using x16 won't happen soon either. If you recall, PCI Express achieves its high capacity because it dedicates lanes to up and down traffic. A graphics card rarely sends information back to the system, so it'll only use half the capacity most of the time. Any cards that use their own on-board CPUs and memory don't need to interact with the system resources all that much, so half the lanes aren't used. This isn't really a problem, but it illustrates how the bandwidth capacity of PCI Express is far more than most hardware needs at this moment and it's likely to slow the adoption of the technology more than most would like.

PCI Express and the Future of Graphic cards

PCI Express, at least in the long term, holds a lot of promise for graphic card speeds, especially once the gulf created between x4 and x8 AGP users has been removed. But what do the two biggest graphic card developers have in store with their respective strategies?



Nvidia

Nvidia have decided to take a slower, but far more practical approach to PCI Express. The biggest problem with manufacturing a PCI Express card is that your GPU has to be compatible. That means you need a chip developed to use the technology and that is costly, especially when you still have to manufacture AGP-based cards, since the one technology isn't going to replace the other for a while.

The GeForce manufacturer decided to use their AGP-based technology on the PCI Express cards and use a bridging chip between the card's PCI Express and AGP interfaces. The AGP side clocks in at x12 and x16 for entry and high-level cards respectively – strong enough to handle the x16 bandwidth of the PCI Express slot, since that translates into 3.1 GB/s and 4.2 GB/s. But AGP doesn't have the benefits you'd find with PCI Express. Also, the conversion done by the bridge chip could theoretically cause data bottlenecks, but there aren't applications really capable of that yet anyway and by the time they do arrive PCI Express should be a far more lucrative standard, allowing Nvidia to manufacture a separate chip cost-effectively.

Breaking the Bottleneck - A brief look at PCI Express

At this moment the only practical application so far that really takes advantage of PCI Express' enormous capacity is real time high Definition Video Editing – great if you're in the broadcast industry, pointless if all you want is to play games or watch a video.

Blazing the trail forward

But PCI Express, in the end, is a great idea and definitely the future. Even though the current demand isn't that big, it is increasing. Also, now all the slots on a board will be of one standard and once AGP gets phased out, developers are bound to leap on the chance to use the high speeds on offer. Both Nvidia and Ati have embraced the technology as have most manufacturers, so PCI Express' uptake is inevitable but slow – it will be a few years before we really taste the benefits of gigabyte transfer speeds. And what benefits they are! PCI Express in action is faster than anything else on your humble PC. One possibility are cards of flash memory that you can slot into your machine or even additional CPUs – there has been quite a bit of success in using Graphic card CPUs (GPUs) as smaller, secondary processors on a PC. Looking into the distant future, external hardware linked to PCI Express cards with cables are being talked about, creating visions of modular PCs in which you can plug hardware as you need it - including fast hard drives and external graphics cards. Of course this is very far off. But in the mean time, PCI Express is slowly going to make its way into the hearts and, more importantly, demands of the end-user PC market. Once it has firmly settled in and is more common across the board of PCs out there, the software will become more and more embracing towards its amazing speeds.




SLI – beating the power of one

SLI stands for ScanLine Interleave, a technology originally pointing to two software outputs creating a display. The image on your screen is created line for line; with SLI two sources split this workload, allowing for faster and more complex displays. SLI became a hardware standard when 3DFX introduced it with their Voodoo 2 cards, allowing two PCI cards to sit side by side and work together. But even though AGP supported this, only one AGP slot appeared on standard motherboards and SLI disappeared. PCI Express brings the opportunity back, since an x16 slot on a board can be used by smaller PCI Express cards, so it's not a slot wasted when you have two or more on the board. And it opens the opportunity for two cards – something Alienware and Nvidia have already been working on, except this time they are calling it Scalable Link Interface. It goes beyond simply having two cards sharing the same work – the new GeForce GPUs can communicate and load-balance with each other, prioritizing tasks and so on – in other words one card can handle part of the screen, such as for instance rendering trees in the foreground, while the other handles the rest (and this can be adjusted dynamically as the demands change). This is a significant step forward and benchmarks have proved that the performance leap is quite incredible. Of course it'll be a while before end users will really need that level of awesome power. Also, technologies such as Pixel Shaders (a graphic effect used a lot in current games) are not entirely compatible with SLI, but this is something that will be fixed in future developments.

And the scalability means that we won't need another massive change in ten years time. Well, let's hope that is the case – this is PC hardware we're talking about, after all!

Setting the date

So when can we expect to see PCI Express appear? Right now, actually. PCI Express boards have already been appearing on the market and both Ati and Nvidia have started to ship the PCI Express versions of their latest cards. Both companies also announced their line-ups, which include several entry-level options for those who can't shell out several thousand for

a cutting-edge model. But the market sentiment is that it will take at least two years before the technology is part of the mainstream. But everyone does feel that PCI Express will replace its predecessor a lot faster than it took for ISA to be phased out – the technology was still available on some boards at the end of the nineties. Games are likely to see the benefit faster, though, since all new top-of-the-range boards are already starting to ship with x16 slots. Combined with the graphic card manufacturers' eagerness to get onto the new standard, it's only a matter of time before games start taking advantage of the extra speed. 

Ati

Ati have leaped onto PCI Express with both feet, even touting the slogan "GO NATIVE – PCI Express Done Right!" as part of their campaign. Unlike Nvidia they have opted for PCI Express native chips on their cards. This obviously means that the cards will be faster than the Nvidia versions and it could gain Ati a valuable foothold in the next generation of graphic cards. But this extra performance is likely to come at a price, since developing and manufacturing two different chips is obviously a far more expensive exercise than just using a bridging chip. Also it's highly unlikely that the extra speed will actually make a difference this early in the game, since games will still be developed to comply with the AGP x4 spec until the technology is considered redundant – game developers won't risk releasing a title that won't run on most of the machines in the market.

Analysts speculate that Ati will eventually concede to introducing a bridge version of their cards as well, but they are far more dedicated to pure PCI Express than Nvidia is, a strategy that could benefit them well in the long run.



opinion

Anime industry treading on thin ice

While Hollywood films based loosely or directly on anime concepts are quite common (*The Fast and the Furious*, *The Matrix*, *Van Helsing*, etc), one seldom hears of actual live action remakes of specific anime series or movies. Many fans of the *Rurouni Kenshin* series were excited by rumours of a *Kenshin* film that did the rounds about a year ago. There is still no official word that any such project is in the works, but two productions that have been confirmed by their studios are the film versions of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Dragonball Z* - two of the most

popular and well known series worldwide.

Dragonball Z is scheduled to go into production by 20th Century Fox in the American summer of this year (some time in the next few months). Ben Ramsey, the screenwriter for "The Big Hit" and "Love and a Bullet", has signed a five hundred thousand dollar deal to write the film's script, but Fox have not released any information about the possible cast or director. The *Evangelion* project is being undertaken by Gainax (the original creators), ADV films (Gainax's distributors in the west) and Weta Workshop (the special

visual effects company, founded by Peter Jackson, which was responsible for the Academy Award winning effects in the *Lord of the Rings* Trilogy). The film is currently in the early stages of production. anton lines



review

saishuu heiki kanojo (saikano)

Literally translated as "She, the Ultimate Weapon", *Saikano* is a tragic war drama told through the eyes of children in love. Dispel any preconceptions you may have of the love story as a genre - this anime breaks all the rules and does so ruthlessly. It plays with the emotions of the audience like whichever sculpture simile you might want to apply. Making use of a realist mode against the backdrop of a hypothetical, futuristic war, the story takes us on a journey through the actions, thoughts and feelings of Shuji and Chise, a young couple who happen to discover each other just as all hell breaks loose. It is Chise, a timid and awkward girl, who first admits her feelings for Shuji. At first, he is unsure of his response and treats her with a rather cruel indifference, but his attitude changes as they start to form a strange but intense bond. During this time, war is breaking out, and soon Sapporo (the

city in which they live) is struck by a vicious air raid. But the enemy bombers are suddenly assaulted by an unidentified flying object that moves with remarkable speed and seems to destroy anything it touches. It is after the raid that Shuji, stumbling through the wreckage of the city, finds Chise alone, crying, in one of the streets, with horrifying wing-like machinery protruding from her back. When he pressures her, he learns that she has agreed to be a test subject for a new weapon system designed by the military, although she does not seem to know why she did it. Shuji blindly chooses to stick with her regardless of what happens, and as a consequence, their relationship progresses across the full spectrum of relationship issues, filling a meagre thirteen episodes with some of the most sincere and detailed emotion that I have ever found in anime. anton lines

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R 108.95

xxxHolic (Graphic Novel)

Watanuki Kimihiro inherited an interesting family trait - he can see spirits, which in turn like to follow him. Then one day he encounters the strange witch Yuko and her two servants, Maru and Moro, in her weird shop, where she promises that she can remove the spirits and his ability to see them. Of course this comes at a price and he has to work off his debt. But soon they receive strange visitors from another land... *xxxHolic's* real appeal is in the comedic chemistry between the characters, mixed with the supernatural events and adventures and is a nice, light hearted addition to any Manga collection.

music.

Maxi Jazz and Sister Bliss are back with yet another album, and it is everything one would expect. It's not the best Faithless album ever, but it is none the less a good collection of songs. Vast synth sweeps and ethereal sounds combine with Maxi's laid back almost-rap in a soothing and entertaining way. Oh, yeah, and the remix of Mass Destruction at the end is brill!



No Roots | Faithless

Here is a great collection of adult-oriented rock for those that enjoy this kind of music. Artists like R.E.M., Alannah Myles, The Corrs, Faith No More, Alice Cooper, Black Sabbath and Prince make up this eclectic mix. This is a great set of songs, but the wide variety of music is rather strange.



Rock Ballads | Various Artists

The movie may have got mixed responses from around the world, but the sound track is amongst one of composer James Horner's best. It is a sweeping, moving experience that will appeal to any fan of the orchestral genre, whether they've seen the film or not. A Josh Groban song also appears on the CD, but it is a bit forgettable. The rest of the disk is great.



Troy Sound Track | James Horner

Vol 3: The Subliminal Verses | Slipknot

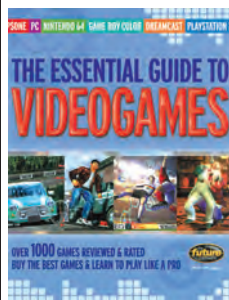
Fans of this hard core band may be sorely disappointed when they listen to this new album. Perhaps Slipknot has progressed, or perhaps they have just lost their edge. With music that is almost reminiscent of System of a Down, this album is a bit of a surprise coming from Slipknot. Check it out before you buy it.



books.

The Essential Guide to Videogames

The Future Network • R312.95 (excl. delivery charge)



Featuring reviews of over 1 000 video game titles, The Essential Guide to Videogames is a must-have for all gamers. This large-format paperback covers many of the major titles released for the PSOne, PlayStation 2, PC, Nintendo 64, Game Boy Color and Dreamcast platforms. Of course, the nature of gaming does mean that the title (released in 2001) does not feature the latest games and may seem dated. However, its focus is on games released during the nineties and also contains a section dealing with classic games. The spotlight remains firmly on games that were groundbreaking at the time but the reviews also cover those titles that failed to live up to the hype and also ones that were just plain terrible.

While the mini-reviews from several UK publications may not

be to everyone's tastes, some comments are made on why specific titles were important for gaming and how they influenced later offerings.

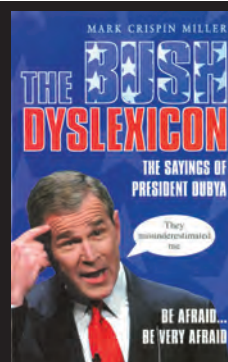
Each review does feature at least one screenshot, but unfortunately, these are not always indicative of the games. Another annoyance occurs in the PC section, where the reviewers slate every other game for not being original. A game like Diablo is criticised for its unoriginality and yet it is perhaps one of the most important titles to introduce online gaming to the masses. Negatives aside, it is a fun read and will appeal to older gamers. It will provide the new gaming generation with some useful background information on how certain titles influenced gaming as a whole.

In The Bush Dyslexicon, Mark Crispin Miller argues that Bush's appointment as president of the US should strike fear into all our hearts. Published shortly after "Dubya's" election, the book contains a myriad of examples on how illiterate and uneducated the most powerful man in the world really is. The author takes different Bush speeches, interviews and quotations and places it in the context of which it was said. He examines how these remarks reflect on the characteristics of Bush. Covering everything from Bush's views on education, religion and health-care, this book provides the reader with valuable insight on just how dangerous this "democratically non-elected" leader can be. Reading this book in a post-9/11 world will just add to the irony of having Bush as president of USA. At least this is an election year so he might not be re-elected.

The Bush Dyslexicon

Mark Crispin Miller

R151.95 (excl. delivery)



books supplied by

role-playing.

opinion

D20 Dominance?

With such a wide variety of games on the market, it can become a real chore to keep up with all the various game systems and rule set-ups. If you have a group that enjoys playing a number of different games, this problem gets even bigger - even if just the GM reads the rule books, it does come down to some poor sod having to remember a lot of different stuff. And let's be honest - systems vary widely, making the task of a multi-game GM even more difficult.



While certain game manufacturers (or publishers), rather have endeavoured to stretch systems across a number of games (the White Wolf World of Darkness series is a notable example, as is the GURPS collection from Steve Jackson Games) there have always been areas where the system has "rubbed thin" - allowing players loopholes or, even worse, just being plain ineffective for the game in question.

Gaming giants Wizards of the Coast decided that, with the release of Dungeons & Dragons third edition, they would create a rule system that was flexible, effective and adaptable. And so the D20 system was born.

Various publishers began making use of the system (almost like a licensed PC game engine) to create new, or recreate old, pencil and paper games.

A very wide variety of D20 system games are now available on the market. Ranging from fantasy (D&D) to sci-fi (Star Wars) to horror (Call of Cthulhu,) these games cover virtually every taste

and genre. The mutability of the system has allowed game creators to change (or rather, modify) the odd rule or two, allowing the system to work better in their setting, while not tasking the GM with tons of new ifs, ands or buts to learn. The core of the system lies in the D&D rule books, with new games supplying little more than setting and modifications. The system is not fool-proof, unfortunately; there are a few games that have been recreated for the D20 system that have lost a bit of their original feel, particularly where simpler systems have been replaced with a slightly more complex and time consuming one. On the whole, however, the general market response to the D20 system has been very good, and is likely to remain that way for a long time. It seems that, with the introduction of this system, Wizards of the Coast seems set to revolutionise pencil and paper gaming, just like they did with the card gaming scene when Magic: The Gathering was first introduced.

review

XCrawl

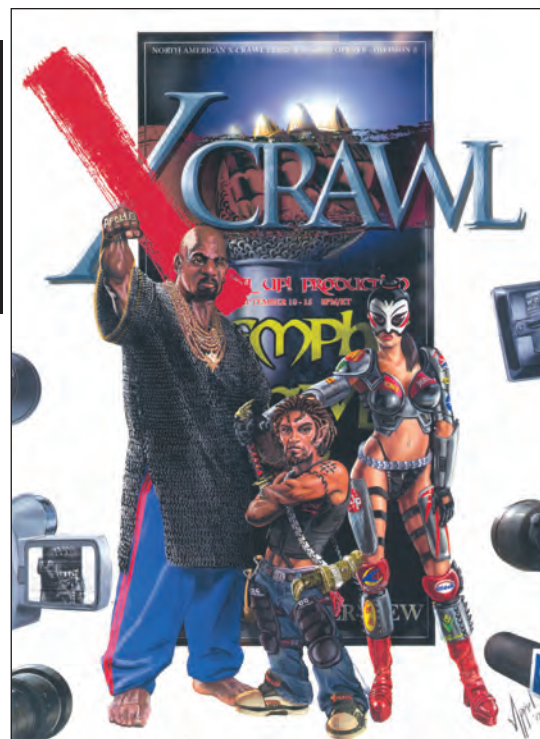
The biggest problem with fantasy role playing is that the genre seems to be getting a little stilted. After all, competing with Dungeons & Dragons is difficult, particularly when all the various settings start feeling the same. Of course, Shadowrun is a notable exception to this "rule," being a techno-fantasy style of game. However, until now, it was the only real example of a game that was breaking the fantasy mould. Until XCrawl came along. This D20 system game uses the rules and creatures from D&D, but places the players in a sports-style dungeon event that reminds one of a mixture between Gladiators and a cheesy game show. Set in an alternate version of our

world, XCrawl is an entertaining and very different approach to fantasy role playing. The Game Master has the luxury of not having to qualify why certain monsters are where they are and gets to make use of high tech for traps, while the players get to experience a very different take on an old idea.

Playing as an XCrawl participant gives the characters celebrity (the death sport is televised) and influence, meaning that players get to be famous, well-liked people within the game (for a change.)

XCrawl is a very fresh breath of air and, even though it seems to lack scope, offers a wide variety of opportunities for excellent gaming.

XCrawl Core Book
Approx. R400



Supplied by Outer Limits (011) 482 3771

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comics.



Spider-Man
Marvel Comics
R24.95

For those who have seen the Spider-Man films and thought they might like to read the comics on which they are based, Marvel Comics have created a new Spider-Man series as a jumping on point for those who don't want to come in not knowing what is going on or what happened before. They have released this new series as part of their Marvel Knights line, containing not-quite adult stories, but with a little more depth than the original comic style.

The first story arc for example, sees Spider-Man's Aunt being kidnapped by someone who has figured out his secret identity. How do you get help in a situation like that without letting anyone else know who you are, and running the risk of the cycle repeating itself?



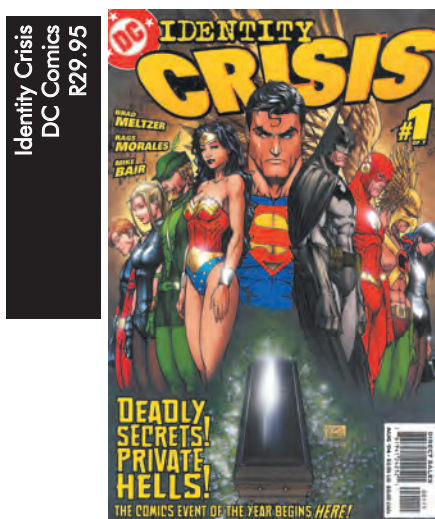
The Nail
Dark Horse Comics
R23.50

A story written by Rob Zombie, full of daisies and happy bunnies...NOT.

This is exactly what you would expect from the master of dark, psychotic music and twisted horror movies like House of a 1000 Corpses. The story is based around a professional wrestler and his family who all enter the Badlands and find themselves getting chased by a band of honest-to-Satan bikers from hell. On the flip side the wrestler is called the Nail because he attaches 9 inch nails to his hands to make sure his opponents stay down.

When these two charming groups meet it's destined to be gory. Like Mad Max on crack.

Read it and don't sleep for a week.



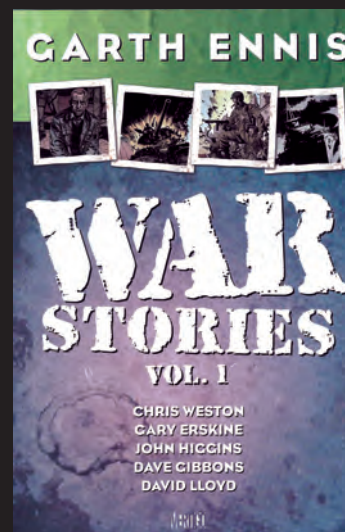
Identity Crisis
DC Comics
R29.95

What if you were a superhero and you decided to retire? You tell the whole world who you really are and you settle in suburbia with your beautiful wife. You are surrounded by your superhero friends who also help provide the best security you could hope for. But this doesn't stop somebody from breaking into your house and murdering your wife. So you and your buddies set out to find the killer. The only problem is that if it was a super-villain, he'll just break out of jail again.

Is simply catching the bad guy enough? Or do you and a select group, who understand, try for more?

graphic novel

War Stories
DC Comics
R154.95



Do you remember the early war library books - the ones that painted the Second World War as a bunch of heroic victories for brave British and American soldiers?

Well now you can read a collected group of stories by acclaimed writer Garth Ennis (*The Darkness*, *Preacher*). In true Ennis style, though, this is a very different take on the war. There are still heroes, but alongside them stand brutality, government, senior officer idiocy and corruption on all sides. It also dares to have a story with a hero from the German side and this all helps form a powerful collection that will make you think twice about the glory of war, while not giving you any doubt of the presence of real heroes. As an added bonus, each story is illustrated by a different artist, all from among the greatest artists from various comic fields. All of this goes along well with Ennis' hard boiled, character-driven writing. An excellent collection.

The N-Gage isn't quite as horrible as it's made out to be. But it's still a rather stupid phone. And those who got stuck with it the first time around no doubt hate the fact that it looks like you're talking into a massive Taco lodged sideways on your face. Thankfully the world is full of people who are not content with what they have and will stoop to using a power drill to fix matters. This article demonstrates how a bit of careful drilling will enable you to talk on the old N-Gage. Of course that will destroy your warranty (and you risk damaging the phone's speaker), but if you're too impatient to wait for the QD, it's an alternative solution.



www.allaboutn-gage.com/viewarticle.php?id=76

Sexual moments in games? Say it isn't so! Yes, while we've been lavishing over the evils of game violence for decades, scenes charged with sexual innuendo have been appearing in games all over the show. Of course they might all have been intended to be that, but they sure look like it from over here (or at least in the perspective of the site). A nice, long and entertaining list of sexual moments in games, even covering the likes of Rampage and Ghosts & Goblins. Yup, you read right.



www.i-mockery.com/minimocks/Sexual-Games/

www.noonelikesyou.net/TFT-robots/

The robots are rising! While Will Smith is destroying Asimov's I, Robot, the revolution has already begun as this protest by our mechanical creations proves. The Robotics & Automation Association of Madison staged a protest where ten normal bots and one server bot protested for reasons known only to themselves (no-one understood the machine code written on the posters). The end of human domination of Earth is near!

You WILL experience the Ninja Burger difference! Now if a Ninja tells you that, it'd better be true. Even if it's not, pretend it is. Our Ninja craze still hasn't abated, so we present yet another Ninjitsu-inspired parody site. Proudly guaranteeing delivery in 30 minutes (or they commit Seppuku), these guys claim to be the masters of Fast Food delivery, using techniques developed by their ancestors. We can think of a few additional perks to this service. For one, you'll never need to open the gate or door, or put away the dog when they deliver.

www.ninjaburger.com



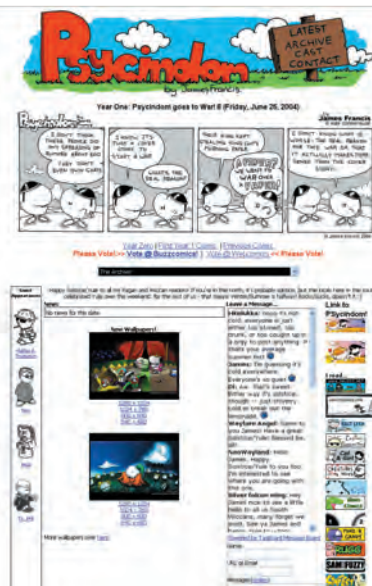
Did you know that the Buddhists have a goddess for amnesia and forgetfulness? Called Meng-Po, or Lady Meng, she wanders the underworld and makes sure that when you get there, on the way to being reincarnated, you won't remember anything, thanks to sipping her Five Flavoured Tea of Forgetfulness. If that's not enough, this site has thousands of other gods to take a look at and they are slowly building the list. A comprehensive site that documents all the gods of civilization, both old and new, it's a great source to spend some time on, meet a few gods, and maybe start a cult. It all begins with a little knowledge.

www.godchecker.com

Webcomics come in all forms these days, ranging through every topic imaginable. If it's in life, it's probably been drawn and written about (except for secluded island communities. Apparently they have bad download speeds and no electricity...). Adding to this eclectic mixture is Psycindom, a comic based around the emotions in your head. Meet King Gut, Ego, Conscience, Hormones (sic) and a whole batch of emotional extras as they go through the daily grind of running someone's head.

Shameless Self-Promotion Advisory

www.noogle.furtopia.org/noogle



Classic Machine

SPECIFICATIONS

Processor:	Motorola MC68000
Speed:	7.16 MHz
RAM:	512K Chip RAM or 1MB Chip RAM on Motherboard
ROM:	256K or 512K on Motherboard
Sound:	Two stereo audio output ports

Commodore

AMIGA 500

Six of the Best!

The advanced power of the Amiga 500 meant that it was home to a selection of fantastic games, many of which have never been bettered...

SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUX

Developer:
Bitmap Brothers
Year: 1990

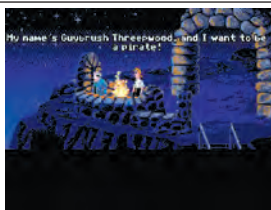
It seems like we're always harping on about the Bitmap Brothers' classic future sport, but honestly, it's really that good. Nothing can prepare you for the sheer ferocity that a single gruelling match can contain; the action throughout is incredibly fast and frenetic and doesn't let up for a single second. Visuals are extremely well drawn and feature that typical metallic sheen which quickly became the Bitmap's trademark, and who could forget the wonderful shouts for "Ice cream"? If ever there was an instant classic, this was it. You must play this before you die.



THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

Developer:
LucasArts
Year: 1991

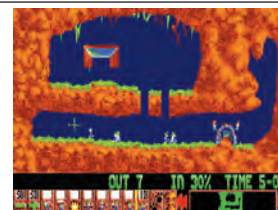
LucasArts' first foray into the world of pirates and treachery is one of its best-loved classics and still proves to be an enjoyable romp today. All of the LucasArts trademarks were in place, from the mind-bending puzzles to the quirky storyline that was made even more enjoyable by the fantastic sense of humour that prevailed throughout. Taking on the role of wannabe pirate Guybrush Threepwood, you soon found yourself immersed in an engaging point-and-click adventure that eventually went on to spawn three sequels.



LEMMINGS


Developer:
Psygnosis
Year: 1991

Controlling a bunch of suicidal rodents may not sound like fun, but it was sheer gaming heaven. Extremely simple in execution - guide a set number of the little critters to an exit - the fiendish levels took an age to master. Lemmings was a massive success and quickly appeared on practically every home system. Although there were many different breeds of Lemming - including Climbers, Blockers and Diggers - nothing was more satisfying than setting a hapless rodent to self-destruct and waiting to hear their customary cries of "Oh No".





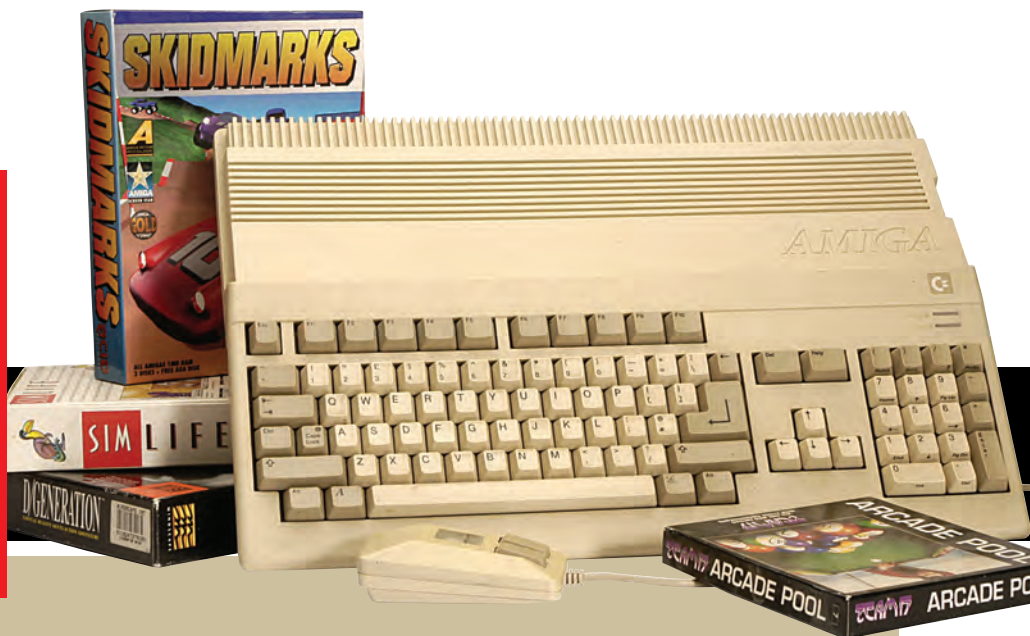
IT MIGHT HAVE LOOKED LIKE A PROPER COMPUTER - YOU KNOW, FOR GROWN UPS - BUT THE AMIGA 500 PROVED TO BE A TREAT FOR GAMERS EVERYWHERE (ADULT OR OTHERWISE)

With the Commodore 64 such a firm favourite with gamers, expectations were high when Commodore announced an (unofficial) follow up. Released in 1987, the Amiga 500 instantly became a classic thanks to some savvy marketing by Commodore and it easily set itself apart from Atari's slightly inferior ST. When the Amiga 1000 had been released in 1985 it was seen more as a business machine and its high price put off many potential buyers. Fortunately, Commodore released a lower spec machine at an affordable price and the Amiga 500 that we all know and love was delivered into the hands of gamers. Pre-loaded with Commodore's popular (though often bugged) Workbench application, the 500 quickly proved itself to be an extremely versatile machine that was just at home calculating spreadsheets as it was playing the likes of Populous or Shadow Of The Beast. Gamers were in awe of the fantastic visuals and superior sound that the Amiga offered and it was arguably a key suspect in the death of the 8-bit market. Unfortunately, Commodore's insistence on bringing out new machines at an alarming rate meant that the company eventually found itself in financial difficulties. Commodore's dream is now long dead but at least we still have fond memories. 

"Why I love my Amiga"

I still have vivid memories of walking into my local Adam's World shop and using every penny of my savings to buy my Amiga all those years ago, complete with a copy of Speedball II, which the shop assistant assured me was brilliant. It was a real step forward from everything else at the time and can still hold its own as a 'proper' computer as well as a games machine today. Plus it helped keep me off the streets for many of my adolescent years...

Martin Mathers



ELITE

Developer:
Acornsoft
Year: 1988

Whilst many will have fond memories of Elite on the early 8-bit computers, the arrival of the Amiga meant that gamers could experience the classic trading game in a whole new way. Ships were now easy to identify (thanks to the power of 16-bit graphics) and The Blue Danube finally sounded like it was supposed to. Of course, 16-bit power also meant that the game was now finally able to tear away from its original 32K roots. Though many preferred Elite's sequel, Frontier, true aficionados will always swear by the original.



SENSIBLE SOCCER

Developer:
Sensible Software
Year: 1991

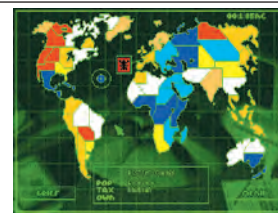
Before Pro Evo, this was the title that was considered king of football. It might not look like much now, but in its day, gamers couldn't get enough of Sensible Software's classic interpretation of the beautiful game. Every player was superbly animated and could pull off all manner of shots and passes. There were plenty of updates to ensure that each team was as up-to-date as possible and the gameplay throughout the series was unrivalled. Sensible Soccer will always have a special place in our hearts.



SYNDICATE

Developer:
Bullfrog
Year: 1993

Bullfrog confirmed its reputation for delivering classic strategy titles with the excellent Syndicate. Set in the typical 'not too distant future', the game saw you controlling a squad of four androids in an attempt to wipe out opposing Syndicates. Once your androids were suitably equipped, you could unleash them on the wonderfully detailed 3D isometric settings. Missions were extremely involving and would range from kidnappings to complex assassinations. Above all, though, the game was incredibly violent and great fun.



AMIGA 500



Classic Machine

Page 1 [top to bottom left to right]

Alien Breed, Aquatic Games, Assassin, Blaster, Bug Bash, Buggy Boy, Cabal, Cannon Fodder, Chaos Engine, Chuck Rock, Defender of the Crown, Dungeon Master, Elite, Emerald Mine, Enlightenment, Fire & Ice, Flashback, Flood, Gemz, Golden Axe, Gravity Force, Great Courts 2, Great Giana Sisters, Gunship, Honda RVF, Hunter, Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis, IK Plus, Ikari Warriors, Indianapolis 500, It Came from the Desert, James Pond Underwater Agent, Katakis, Lost Lap, Lemmings, Lotus Turbo Challenge, Lotus Turbo Challenge 2, Marble Madness, Mortal Kombat 2, Mr. Nutz

Page 2 [top to bottom left to right]

Nebulus, Netherworld, North and South, Nuclear War, Oskar, Overlander, Paratrooper, Parasol Stars, Pipe Dreams, Populous, Parts of Call, Predator, Push Over, Railroad Tycoon, Rick Dangerous, Rick Dangerous 2, Risk, Rodland, Secret of Monkey Island, Sensible World of Soccer, Seven Cities of Gold, Shadow of the Beast, Shanghai, Stunt Cars 2, Super Hang-On, Super Raid, Test Drive, Traders, Turrican, Turrican 2, Uridium 2, Wing Commander, Wings Of Fury, Winter Games, Wonderboy in Monsterland, World Games, Worms, Xenon 2, Zool, Zool 2



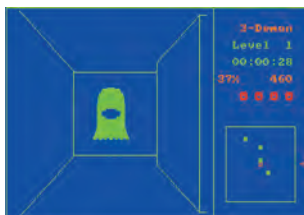
LEGACY

2D First Person Shooters

Long before the likes of Decent, Terminal Velocity and Quake existed the 2D [sprite-based] first person shooters that started it all. How far back can you remember?



3D Monster Maze
1981
ZX81



3-Demon
1983
DOS



Dungeon Master
1987
Atari ST, DOS



Wolfenstein
1987
Atari ST, DOS



Blake Stone
1993
DOS



Doom
1993
DOS



Ken's Labyrinth
1993
DOS



Ultima Underworld
1992
DOS



Heretic
1994
DOS



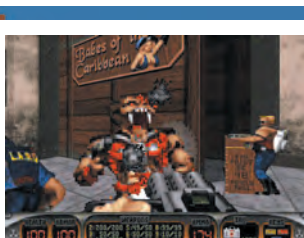
Rise of the Triad
1994
DOS



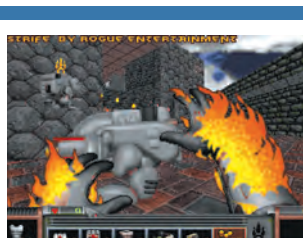
System Shock
1994
DOS



Hexen
1995
DOS



Duke Nukem 3D
1996
DOS



Strife
1996
DOS



Star Wars: Dark Forces
1995
DOS

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Intel® BIOS

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Monitor

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Installer
Intel® Express
BIOS Update

SMART

Intel® Integrator
Toolkit

Available from the following Intel® Authorised Distributors:



www.annex.co.za



www.axiz.com



www.rectron.net



AN ODE TO DOOM

'Twas the night before DOOM,
and all through the house,
I had set up my multi-playing networks,
each with a mouse.

The networks were strung,
with extra special care
in hopes that DOOM,
soon would be there.

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
while visions of demons danced through their heads.

And my computer's processor it was so quick,
boy was I glad I bought that 486.

When out on the Internet there was a Usenet posting,
I dialed right in to see what it was boasting.

Off to the news reader I flew like a hound,
"Oh no," I cried! The news reader was down!

Frustrated, bewildered, feeling really low,
I leaned back to see what I heard out the window.

When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
but a group of 6 cars, driving 60 I fear!

With a big young driver, just look at him go!

I knew in a moment, it must be John Romero!

Over the speed limit, his band of cars came,

And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name:

"Now, Jay! Now, John!

Now, Dave and Kevin!

On, Adrian! On, Sandy!

On, Shawn and Robert!"

To the top of the driveway!

Don't hit that wall!

Now stop your car, stop your car, stop your car all!

Leaving the car, he entered the house,

Walking quietly, so as to not wake the spouse.

He was dressed in a T-shirt, and a pair of jeans too,
I was unsure of what he was going to do.

Boxes of DOOM he had flung on his back,
and he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.

Those boxes - how they sparkled! The shrink-wrap so tight!

The character was drawn on the front, just ready to fight!

The Chain Saw and Shotgun he held in his hand,

Where was the BFG9000?: The best gun in the land.

And then I saw it, strapped to his back,

Along with a copy of the "Official" DOOM FAQ!

A wink of John's eye and a twist of his head,

Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,

Installed it on the network, then turned with a jerk.

And placing a hand into his jeans,

out came his keys - oh how they gleamed!

He sprang to his car, to the id team gave a whistle,
and away they all drove, like DOOM's launching of a missile.

But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,

"DEMONS TO ALL, AND TO ALL A HELLISH NIGHT!"

On December 10th, 1993, id Software released a game that changed first person shooters forever. And after the success of Wolfenstein 3D, the anticipation for it was big; so big, in fact, that it crashed the servers minutes after the demo was uploaded, not to mention inspiring this fan poem written way back then by Hank Leukart. With the Doom collection being released in anticipation for Doom 3's imminent arrival, we thought we should revisit that bloody, meaty chunk of history...

Win a copy of the Doom Collector's Edition! Simply send your details, along with the author of this poem, to comp@nag.co.za. Three randomly drawn correct entries will each win a copy of the Doom Collector's Edition and a Doom 3 T-Shirt, courtesy of MegaRom Interactive



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subscriptions department
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internet
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printing:
print ability
 +27 11 785 4000

distribution sa:
junk mail distribution

distribution international:
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Yannis Mallat interview and Commodore Amiga 500 feature are reproduced from the magazine games™ under licence from Highbury - Paragon Ltd.
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Paragon House, St Peter's Road,
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DOOM is coming!

RAMJET'S RAMPAGE

BIG ~~FISH~~ FLUSH...

"Just who exactly made you God's gift to the world?"



I may be a great many things - Lord knows I have been called a great many things - and I may do a great many things. Many of those things offend people. I know. I get the letters. But one thing I do not do, despite all of my other shortcomings, is fail to admit when I am wrong. This, however, is apparently not a very fashionable attitude.

I have noticed (over the last few years) that there is a certain sect within the gaming community that rivals King Canute [I read he was actually very modest, Ed] in arrogance. Not all gamers mind you, just some - put that pen down and let me finish.

As I was saying before you so rudely interrupted me, there is a section of gamers that tends to be amazingly arrogant and incredibly self important. These guys lord it over their community and behave like self proclaimed gaming-messiahs, spewing their opinions (and you all know what I think about opinion, so we won't go there) as though they were holy gospel handed to them by the gods of "leet." They go around pounding their verbal fists into the faces of anyone that doesn't agree, and then smile smugly when their under-achieving and self-loathing fan-boys ooh and ah over their actions. And they never admit that they are wrong. It takes something they don't have to admit that you're wrong... things like intelligence, understanding and, above all, maturity.

Is it gaming that does this to people, or are these people attracted to gaming, for some or other reason? I think it must be the latter, because I have met some pretty nice gamers in my time. I think, perhaps, these guys, who have as much life experience as a socially-challenged mole, have assumed their status based on the fact that they are good at games. Not through real life experience. Not through wisdom gained by actually living. No, rather they have assumed their attitude and self-imposed (and utterly ridiculous) status through some unwritten, unspoken and thoroughly demented, computerised "right of passage." Really, don't they realise that being good at games doesn't make you anything more than a guy who is good at games (and some might say a geek, too.) These are the types that make me wish military conscription was mandatory again - teach them some real life lessons, damn it!

I say, if these guys want to go around acting like the sons of some cyber-god, we should really put them to the test. Let's crucify one, see what happens...

... I wonder if The Basilisk is busy on Friday night.



Soft Stuff: [melted plastic]

Right - next issue - good things are happening in the next issue, we just can't talk about them here. But we can tell you about two monster previews we're working on right now - Warhammer 40K: Dawn of War and The Movies. We also review the mighty Ground Control II and a few other cool games that haven't arrived at time of writing. James is also working on what must be a top secret feature. Either that or he forgot to tell anyone about it so we can add it to the September issue planning document - thanks James.

Disclaimer: Say goodbye to the disclaimer block - next month it's gone!

Hard Stuff: [quantum physics]

In September we group test a crate load of PC cases, remember those things, used to be boring but are now cool. Other hardware news is a little scant. There's enough stuff lying around here to sink a small [partially inflated] rubber duck but we're not sure what's going where at this stage. Hang on, how about 2 PCI express motherboards and 2 different AX600XT 3D cards. Hooray!

Timing - The rather excellent September issue will be on the shelf 26 August 2004.

fun,
anyone?
PlayStation.2

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